

Homily by Deacon Steve Livingston

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - August 2, 2020

IS 55:1-3 ... PS 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18 ... ROM 8:35, 37-39 ... MT 14:13-21

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL ACORDING TO THE **WORLD**: BUY NOW! ... YOU **DESERVE** IT! ... ON SALE! ... FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY! ... **TWO** FOR THE PRICE OF ONE! ... NO MONEY DOWN! ... and 0% FINANCING! ... And above all **never** forget the two ... great commandments: “If it feels good do it!” ... and the second is like it ... “He (or she) who acquires the most stuff ... wins!” ... the gospel of the **world!**

When I was in the army I spent many hours **training** ... so that I could deal with **military** situations by **reacting ... without** taking time to think ... **without** taking time to decide. And the hours the Army spent training me paid off. I became **what** I was trained to be. ... But ... many years before ... I was **ever** in the Army ... my training had begun ... to make me what I am today ... a highly trained ... American **consumer**. The various media ... shows me this great item or that wonderful gadget and screams at me that my life will be so much better ... if I will but **buy** it! So ... my eyes glaze over ... and I go into my trance-like state and I start saying all those things I’ve been trained to say ... “**Wow! Cool!** I’ve **gotta** get **that!**”

And so ... I do ... and then ... well ... I cannot even count the times in my life that I have thought that this or that was so neat and would enhance my quality ... or enjoyment ... of life so much ... and then ... after I bought it ... when the **new** had worn off ... into the **closet** it would go ... never to be used ... or **maybe** ... never even to be **seen** ... ever again. Some of my fellow highly trained consumers ... the ones much more **ambitious** than I ... from time to time will collect these treasures and have a **garage** sale... so then their stuff can go ... and live in somebody else’s closet.

Well, Isaiah asks us the question: “**Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy?**” And a truth emerges: We spend so much of our lives ... and much our resources ... in the pursuit of ... and the accumulation of ... stuff, ... stuff we do not need, ... stuff we do not really even want ... and stuff which will never ... **ever** satisfy.

And while we’re spending our time and money and energy on these worthless things ... all we **really** need ... is right here ... freely offered by our loving and generous God who tells us: “Come, **without** paying and **without** cost ...”; a God whose love is always there ... extended to us. St. Paul tells us that this love is **so** great that ... **nothing** ... not life nor death nor even our present or future **things** “... will be able to separate us from the love of God ...”.

Matthew gives us this wonderful and beautiful story today ... this example of our Savior’s love and compassion. A beloved cousin ... a great and holy man ... has been murdered. All Jesus really wants to do is to be alone and grieve. But in his great love and compassion for this crowd ... a crowd who is actually intruding on His grief ... He sets his own needs aside ... cures their sick and **feeds** them. He multiplies the loaves and fishes and he **feeds** them. He gives them what they really need. And ... at the end of this miraculous story ... Matthew tells us ... “... They all ate and ... were ... **satisfied** ...” This love continues for us ... today. And it is so great ... that day after day ... week after week ... God ... offers us own His Body and His own Blood to sustain us ... **without** paying and **without** cost ... The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

But this is a concept that is ridiculous in the eyes of the world! It is a notion that is completely alien and absolutely suspect ... according to the gospel of the world. After all, it tells us: "You **get** ... what you **pay** for." So **how** ... can we possibly **value** what we spend **no money** on? In the eyes of the world it makes no **sense!**

We, of course, **are** people of faith who live the Gospel of Our Lord ... and not the gospel of the World ... and yet ...? Thomas Paine tells us: "What we obtain too **cheaply** ... we esteem too **lightly** ...". And I think ... if we are honest ... sometimes we must ask ourselves: "Do we take God's **love** ... and His **gifts** for granted ... and fail to realize how ... **precious** they are ... **because** they are **free**?" Free to **us** yes ... but purchased at a **terrible** price ... Christ's own suffering and death!

It also makes no sense in the eyes of the world that God could possibly be so loving ... so generous. Sooner or later ... the **world** says "there is **always** a bill. "There's no such thing as a free **lunch!**" So ... **what's** the catch?

Ah ... Well ... **there** you've got me! You see ... this time ... the gospel of the world is right. There **is** a catch! You see ... when God reaches out to us and offers us his unconditional love ... we have to go to the trouble ... to reach out **our** hand to Him ... and take it. But I wonder ... if sometimes we **hesitate** to do this ... because **maybe** ... to reach out our hands to God ... we might just need to let go ... to empty our hands of some of our worthless stuff.