

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, July 18, 2021
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle B

The well-known Jesuit homilist and former editor of *Theological Studies*, Walter J. Burghardt, published a book entitled “Seven Hungers of the Human Family”. In this book the author presents seven things all humans need and for which they yearn when their need is not satisfied. Food is one of these seven things, and this is not surprising, since no human can live without food for any significant period of time. But the six other things mentioned are somewhat surprising, because none of them are material things concerning the body, such as clothes, shelter, medicine and so on. Five of the six other things are: freedom, justice, love, peace and understanding. Again, we can see without too much difficulty that all humans have a basic desire to be free from any form of slavery, to be treated fairly, to give and receive affection, to enjoy a conflict-free society, and to have their opinions and ideas received sympathetically. However, the seventh item in Burghardt’s list is more surprising. The seventh item is truth. According to him, humans are just as hungry for truth as they are for food, for freedom, and for all the other things he mentions.

It seems that the evangelist Mark would agree with Burghardt. Although his Gospel presents very few explicit teachings of Jesus, it states many items that Jesus was teaching and that the crowds were hanging on his every word. Today’s Gospel scene shows such an instance of thirst and hunger for the truth Jesus brings. And Jesus is well aware of this phenomenon. His heart goes out to the crowd who tracked him down in the hope of having him feed their hunger for truth. Like sheep without a shepherd to look after them, they wander about in a sort of spiritual wilderness, not being adequately fed by the teachings of the scribes. Moved with compassion, Jesus decides to feed them himself. In the words of Mark, “he began to teach them at great length”. Afterwards he will feed their bodies, too, by multiplying bread and fish. But, for now he undertakes the more important task of feeding their souls.

At this point we should all ask ourselves what we do to nourish our souls. In a well-balanced Christian life, a few basic disciplines are needed on a daily basis to ensure the preservation and constant growth of God's life in us. The first and most important of those disciplines is prayer – which Jesus himself emphasized in our Gospel today to His disciples. “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while”. Sad to say that this invitation of Jesus is not very attractive in our world today. Most people don't have time to pray, no time for church and no time to be with the Lord.

By inviting his disciples to rest awhile, Jesus is reminding us that we cannot overextend ourselves and forget the things that matter most. In a deeper way, however, there is a message that modern men and women need to hear. The break the Gospel advocates is also an invitation to rest in the Lord. We need to make time for God in our lives. We must remember to keep company with the Lord. To continue being effective at work and ministry we need to ask the help of Him from whom all energies flow, from whom all encouragement spring. In short, we need to rest in the Lord.

Amen