

Lent IV

March 14, 2021

Galatians 4: 21-31 & John 6: 1-14

The Third Sunday in Lent, as we saw last week, was called the “Sunday of renunciation” when the early Church Christians were asked to make a choice, choice either to follow Christ by renouncing Satan or choice to refuse following Christ and return to their former life. And the lesson was that when the devil is gone out of a body, the empty space must be filled with something stronger, something more powerful, and something bigger.

The keyword in the gospel that we read last was “empty”. And we need to define that word. Emotionally, emptiness is a feeling of inner desolation: a complete absence of joy, hope, or satisfaction. When a person experiences emptiness, he finds himself in a deep hole which results in addictions and escapist behaviors. Some feelings that relate to emptiness often include sadness, depression, and loneliness.

When you lose touch with your soul and are feeling empty, you will certainly lose touch with your life purpose, the reason for which God created you.

Some people are empty, and they even know it. They hold onto their knowledge, their Ph.D., the books that they read, but they are empty. They rely on their wisdom, but they are empty. They count on their wealth, how successful they are at work, but they are empty.

The people of today’s gospel experienced some form of emptiness. Jesus knew that they had larger spiritual needs than a one-off meal. Even though they didn’t know it, they were following Jesus because their hearts were empty. It is true that they were physically hungry, but they were spiritually starving to death.

As we can see, Jesus knew that the occasion of the crowd’s hunger and the timing of his provision would offer an opportunity to declare who he was. He also knew that this would give him an opportunity to shape his disciples’ faith: “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world”. I recently heard someone said, “Christ is not an exit door. When you enter, you are in”.

Lessons for us

1. Be aware of your emptiness.

Many of us have a deep emptiness within, that nothing physical will ever fill. It’s a longing to be connected to our Creator. There’s something missing from our lives. Something is missing, and in its place, we have substituted all sorts of things, material things, power, sex, accomplishment, but none of these ever really satisfies us. We always want more. Many people today look deep within their hearts and find nothing but a deep emptiness there. Awareness of this reality is the first step in your healing process.

2. **How to fill our emptiness.**

Lent is the time to look for ways to fill our emptiness. The first thing that we see when we read the gospels is that Jesus first preached the Word of God. That's the very first thing he did when he came on the earth. Lent is that time when we pause from our "business" and learn how to dive into the Word of God as a resource to our questions and life concerns. David said, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119: 105).

But we also fill our emptiness with the body and the blood of Christ. That's why, after preaching the Word of God, Jesus established the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. In fact, it was to fill our emptiness that Christ came into the world. He said, "I am the bread of life..." You can search all over the world to find that one thing, that thing that is missing in your life, but until you feed on Jesus, you will never be satisfied. I pray for those who, for some reason, don't receive the holy communion regularly.

3. **We need to have the "eyes of Christ."**

In today's gospel, Jesus first saw that the crowd was hungry. It was the crowd that begged him for food. He recognized that these people had larger spiritual needs than just physical food. This story is a great reminder for us to have eyes like Christ, always on the lookout for opportunities to care physically and spiritually for those he is sending to us. When we look around us what we see is nothing but emptiness. People are hungry for Jesus and they don't know it. We see that in our families, in our neighborhood, and in our country. Having the eyes of Christ means that we identify that need and help them to meet it by the example of our life.

4. **The little boy with the little bag**

Here is the point about the little boy: we will never know which little person God will use, and how. That means that we are never just lost in the crowd. We are never without anything to offer. We never know who the Lord will claim and use in ways that we cannot even predict.

The Lord knows us all. He knows where we are, what we have, and how we can be used. He can do eternally amazing things with the little fragments of our lives that we're carrying around and that we tend to think are not much. The Lord knows it all. Just bring to him your fragments and he will make something powerful out of them. Just bring to him your broken heart and he will heal it. Just bring to him your broken world and he will restore it. Just bring to him your country that has now become Babylon (a land of confusion) and he will rebuild it. May the Lord help us answer this high call!

Prayer

God Almighty, show us the empty places in our hearts and the ways we try to fill them. Then lead us back to You and show us how we can position our lives and our country to be filled and fulfilled by Your promises and the power of Your love. Through Christ our Lord! Amen.