

SUNDAY 18 – B (Homily 01)

“Fully Human and Alive”

(Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15, 31a; Psalm 78; Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35)

An ancient philosopher once wrote, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Someone else once quipped, “The unlived life is not worth examining.” St. Iraneus took this further with famous quote: “The glory of God is man and woman fully alive.”

Are you living your life to the full? Are you fully alive?

Jesus and St. Paul together today show us the way to the fullness of human life: Come to Jesus and live a new way of life.

Gerry Kelly, a lay theologian who now serves as a consultant to different Catholic entities out of Ottawa, used to teach scripture at Kisemanito Center in Grouard, Alberta. He would go out to communities in the north to present sessions on the gospel of Mark. Only a few communities responded well. Most seemed indifferent. Yet in those same communities, he noted that if a healer showed up, the churches were packed with people who never went to church and weren't interested in learning about Jesus in the scriptures. A comment he made one day struck me. He reflected that in one community, if a psychic rooster would show up, the church would be packed, but for good solid teaching on who Jesus was and what he did, few seemed interested.

Gerry's experience is a reflection of the first reading from the book of Exodus. Though the chosen people had experienced liberation from Egypt, the challenge of living by faith was too much for them. They wanted to give up, to go back to the old familiar way of life in Egypt, even if it meant oppression and slavery. So God had to intervene by providing them with mana every day. It was an invitation to them to grow stronger in faith, to believe that God was truly with them in the desert, to live one day at a time.

The people who had experienced the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves in the gospel were very similar. They were after Jesus not so much to grow in a faith relationship with him and experience the peace and joy that a relationship with him could give them. What they really wanted was free bread, physical food that is a symbol of the material possessions, prestige and power that this world is addicted to.

Jesus chided them for missing the mark. He challenged them to change their belief system, to conversion, to grow in faith, to let go of the old way of life centered on material things, personal prestige, power and control – all these things that obsess people in our society and in his. He invited them to believe in him, in what he could give them, eternal life. The challenge he presented to the people of his day, is the same challenge he presents to us today.

What are we living for? What do we want out of life? Do we have faith in him as the only source of true human fulfillment and happiness?

St. Paul in the second reading is very strong and blunt. He does not mince words in challenging his readers. He affirms and insists that they must no longer live as those who do not believe in Jesus. They must put away their former way of life, their old selves that were corrupt and deluded by lusts of all sorts, and be renewed in the spirit of their minds. He goes on to say that they must put on a whole new personhood, because they were recreated now through faith in Jesus into the likeness of God.

The choice is ours. We can fritter our lives away pursuing all kinds of goals that will get us nowhere, or we can go for gold, give our lives to Christ as the bread of life, surrender our lives to him, commit ourselves to him, and live in his Spirit of peace, joy and love for God, others, ourselves and all of God's creation. That, I submit, is the only way to living a truly human life full of meaning and satisfaction.

Lana L. Comstock recounts part of her story in one of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series of books. She grew up in a secular family that did not go to church and where Christmas was only about Santa Clause. She was not unhappy nor neglected nor abused in any way, yet always felt a mysterious loneliness and emptiness inside. One day as a child digging in the sand on a beach, she uncovered a silver cross with the words *Jesus is Lord* engraved on the back. She didn't know what it meant but kept it as one of her secret treasures.

As a teenager, she sought out fun and pleasure. Though she never got caught, her life was going downhill fast, and she still felt that emptiness inside. One day she decided that she should try to put God in her life and started attending different churches with her friends. Most of the services

she experienced were good, but one was life changing. She was participating in a charismatic conference where there was an altar call.

Linda recounts the event this way: “As the music began to play, I was consumed, and I felt Him. He was the One I had been searching for. He was the One who had been calling me. The presider called for those who didn’t know Him to come forward. I couldn’t have stopped my feet if I had wanted to. He prayed, I prayed, and my life was never again the same. I went home and wept with joy. A seemingly lifelong void was finally filled. For some reason, I am quite sure my search began the day I hit metal with my little shovel and found a cross that said, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Now I no longer have to dig to find my treasures. All the treasures I’ll ever need are just a prayer away.”

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is an act of faith in Jesus as the Bread of Life, as the manna that we are given weekly and perhaps even daily, for the journey through our own personal deserts. When celebrated with faith, it will transform us into that new creation that St. Paul puts before us in the second reading.

So today let us come to Jesus as the Bread of Life, put away our old ways of life, and follow Jesus into lives full of love, service and meaning. May those words of St. Iraneus truly apply to us: We are the glory of God when we are fully human and fully alive.