

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 19th 2013

The other morning I was realizing we have life second by second. Not all at once. What would it be like to have your whole life, beginning to end, all at once? All of a sudden, all of it -- right here and now: complete, needing nothing more, desires satisfied, thirsts quenched, hungers satisfied?

Pondering that, here's what I came up with: I think that wouldn't be life at all.

Living is growing. Living is moving, moving freely by choice and action, from being limited – materially, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually – into self transcendence, into a horizon that gets bigger with each new step further into life. It comes down to moving from desires to satisfaction, and the process is what is thrilling. Coming to a well of cool water as a long walk is finally ending. Going to Grandma's for Thanksgiving, getting there, reveling in her warm, welcoming embrace, and then moving forward to delicious foods, memories, laughs and comfort. Getting through what seemed our longest years and finally becoming a teenager. Getting through eight semesters of college. Raising a family. Becoming a good, magnanimous, loving person. And living out the pursuit of all these good things in the company and in league with others -- with family, friends, and community. These all take time: some of it hard, much of it joyous, all of it necessary.

God portions our lives out into moments, days, weeks, and years. Along with that, God also gives us the means, the way, and the truth to figure out, decide and act upon on a whole hierarchy of desires which He has placed within us. They make up the fuel moving us to pursue what is lacking -- to search for it, go after it, and find it. Food. Love. Intimacy. New experiences, knowledge, and understanding. Safety and security. Companionship and community.

Our bodies and souls, full of desires for these things, testify that we long for fullness of life. Along the way, we have moments when we taste it, not to the full, but the taste is real and it satisfies—for the moment. But we always seem to hunger for more.

Sometimes we seek and go after momentary satisfactions willy-nilly, in no particular order – like a puppy going from his master, to his food, to scampering about, then back again to the others. Sometimes we go after them according to what we think is more fulfilling, and we plan accordingly. Sometimes we pursue them according to what is more fulfilling, and for these reasons we discern and pray – sometimes in solitude, sometimes with others – and then decide and try to live accordingly.

Underneath all our desires, mingling with them and undergirding them, is the desire for God. Life is sorting out and ordering all our other desires to the one that is deepest and most passionate, the one that gives ultimate meaning and relevance to all the rest. We sometimes know it and are sometimes unaware of it, but what we want ultimately is a loving relationship with God—and through that, a loving relationship with everything and everyone else.

God is the only one who can slake our deepest thirst, feed our deepest hunger, satisfy our desires to the full. We want God's company, God's protection, God's love. We want intimacy with the one who gives us our very life, with all its desires.

Often we grab for substitutes. Fast food. Faster living, faster cars. More convenience, more comfort, unrestricted sexual fulfillment (without responsibility), and the so-called “right” of complete freedom to do whatever I want whenever I want to.

Jesus, in today’s Gospel, offers us the ultimate food and drink: giving us bread that is His body and drink that is His blood, poured out for us. We need to calm down, become more simple, and receive quietly this body and blood of Christ into our own fleshly selves. Doing so puts us squarely in God’s company, secures us under God’s protection, and engages us in God’s intimate love. It unites us with the one who is giving us our life, with all its desires.

We can do this at Mass, thanks be to God. The Eucharistic Prayer makes ready the food we receive at Communion. Here we ponder, chose, and act to fulfill our realest hunger and thirst. We eat the bread which Christ identifies as “true food,” and we drink the blood which is “true drink.” In doing this, we enter into the kind of communion Our Lord speaks of in today’s Gospel: “Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him.”

This communion will nourish the moment-by-moment course of our lives, if we let it. It will bring order to our desires. It will lay out the way for us, serve up the truth of things, and move us to the very pulse of life. It will satisfy our desire to unite our hearts and minds to one another and to God.

Kevin Kersten, S.J.