

Jesus is the REAL Bread

By Santiago Lange



There are few aromas more pleasant, more tantalizing, and more enticing than the smell of freshly baked bread.

An old adage says: “Bread is the staff of life.” An Armenian Christian once wrote that Westerners do not really understand this, and that therefore they do not fully appreciate what Jesus meant when He said in John chapter 6, “I am the Bread of Life.” In the Middle East, bread is not something served occasionally at a meal. It is the heart of EVERY meal.

The people in Jesus’ day knew immediately what Jesus meant when He said - “I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.” They knew He was claiming to be the staff of life; the sum and substance of life, the essence of life. Jesus was saying that the only way you can come to true life, the only way you can experience authentic life, is through Him.

When Jesus said: “I am the Bread of Life”, He meant that as His followers we don’t journey alone, unprepared, lacking the resources to complete life’s sojourn. Jesus meant that He gives us food for the journey - Himself. His indwelling Spirit gives us the guidance to live the quality of lives God created us to live.

In reflecting upon this truth, we discover that Jesus’ metaphor conveys important meanings. First, we require more than material things. We are spiritual beings, not just material. People who hold a materialistic view of reality of course would argue this point. They see humans as simply another species of the animal kingdom. But as Christians, we believe that we are made in the image of God. We are spiritual beings as well as material beings.

Even if the stomach is filled with a good meal, even if we have plenty of money, even if we have all the conveniences, our inner being will still not be satisfied. Jesus was saying that there is more to life than the physical. “Man shall not live by bread alone”, Jesus said, that is by food and material things alone, “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

I recall the witness of a man who felt his life was empty. He was very successful according to today’s standards. Why did he feel this way? There is a deep, inner hunger that must be satisfied, which we can’t escape. There is a hunger gnawing away that only God can satisfy.

Jesus knows there is a hunger of the heart, a hunger of the soul. We need more than material things to really satisfy ourselves as human beings. Materialism alone is unfulfilling. Materialism can even intensify our emptiness. We have more than we need of the things we can taste, feel, hear, touch, see, and smell. We are a violent society. Crime is a frightening reality. There is a breakdown of the family. We have the best of technology. In the western world we have an abundance of material goods. And yet, there is a hunger that stalks our lives, a hunger deeper than the heart knows. The eyes cannot see it, the hands cannot touch it, the tongue

cannot taste it, the nose cannot smell it, and ears cannot hear it. There is a deeper hunger in us that must be satisfied, if we are to be all that God meant for us and wants us to be.

Human beings live by truth, by faith, by feeling, by creativity, by meaning, by worship, by hope, by joy, by beauty, by inspiration, as well. We also live by relationships. There is a fundamental need to experience love, acceptance, forgiveness, laughter, and a relationship to a spiritual power and person greater than ourselves.

When Sir Ernest Shackleton, the British explorer, lost his ship “Endurance” in the Antarctic, and prepared his men for an arduous journey to safety, he told them they were to travel light. They were to throw away everything and anything that was not needed to sustain life. Shackleton recorded that they kept the bread knowing that it could be the difference between life and death in a few days. Money was of little value in this particular situation and was too heavy to carry so the coins were left behind.

St. Augustine said about God, “Oh Lord you have made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” There is a deeper hunger of the heart, just as vital, just as crucial as physical sustenance. Life depends on two kinds of bread, physical and spiritual. Jesus was saying that the Bread of Life is intensely personal. It isn’t something distant or alien or abstract. It is a personal gift, just as when a neighbor bakes bread and brings it to your home as a gift. “I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry”. Here Jesus is saying – “Welcome to my table. You are precious to me. I desire for you to come to me. I invite you to enter into holy fellowship”. He invites us to come and partake of his spiritual reality. He offers himself as food for our soul.

Finally, Jesus also said that The Bread of Life is time-sensitive. When we go to the store, we discover codes that say something like, “Sell before September 2018.” We pay attention to those codes. We don’t want sour milk or stale bread. Christ’s bread is time-sensitive as well. Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Why? Because before the time of preservatives, bread needed to be baked daily, it could grow moldy and stale in arid or damp climates. The truth of Jesus’ teaching is that we need to depend not occasionally, but daily on Him.

The crowd in John’s Gospel needed bread. Not the kind of bread that we can eat and not the kind of bread that we can spend. They were searching for the bread which gives life. Jesus told the crowd, “The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Do we feel spiritually hungry? Do we wish to commune with the One who gives Life? Jesus says: “I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats of this Bread will live forever. ”I am the Bread of Life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” When we eat of the bread that Christ came to give us, we shall find a sense of fulfillment in life, we shall be moved by a larger purpose of life and we shall experience an abiding hope in the future – “for he who believes in me shall never die.”

Let us always be ready to come to the Lord’s Table. Let us come with believing hearts, ready, by faith, to receive the Bread of Life. For Jesus makes this promise: “I will never turn away anyone who comes to me“. □