



“Jolly Ranchers and Big Gulps”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

Consider the words we just sang in the “Gospel Acclamation”:

Alleluia! Lord and Savior; open now your saving Word.

Let it burn like fire within us; speak until our hearts are stirred.

Alleluia! Lord we sing – for the Good News that you bring!

And then we come to the words in today’s Gospel: “unless you eat the flesh, of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” and the human mind reels, and says “HUH?!”

That ‘burns like fire’ alright -- burns a hole, right in my thinking. And the human brain (Monty Python – ‘my brain hurts!’) says: that’s just downright weird! So human logic kicks in, and add in a bit of saucy cynicism, “I’ll just have a couple of Jolly Ranchers, and a Big Gulp please.” None of this ‘flesh’ stuff.

But then we hear words like Psalm 34, “Fear the Lord, you Saints for those who fear the Lord, lack nothing. Lions want and suffer hunger – but those who seek the Lord, lack nothing, that is good.

We sang in our opening hymn “Be Thou my Vision, Lord of my heart.” Be Thou my “Best thought” by day by night. My presence, my light. Be Thou my shelter; and be my “high tower”; Heart of my heart; Power of my power.

What is it about Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs that lifts our hearts?! What is it about Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs that opens our minds to new understandings? What is it about Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs that deepens our wisdom to new depths of insight and appreciation?

Clearly, this is the language of "faith"; of another dimension. "Let the trees of the Forest clap their hands!" "The mountains sing out with joy." "The waves of the sea; the floods have lifted up their voice." Psalm 34 again - "Taste and see, that the Lord is good."

What is it about Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs that moves the human heart? "What is it about Scripture, and Sacred Texts, that resonate in a way that an instruction manual for your new microwave does not?"

This is the language of "faith"; and that language requires its own vocabulary; and that language helps us to (lay hold of) access this world (to enter this world) – this world of faith. And we Sing it, and we Breathe it, and we Speak it, we Read it, we HEAR it, and we eat it and drink it. And all of this ENRICHES us; and COMPLETES us; RENEWS us, and SATISFIES us, in ways that Jolly Ranchers and Big Gulps cannot.

I'm not against Jolly Ranchers and Big Gulps. Just don't try and live on that! We need more substance. (It's Rally Day - there might even be some Jolly Ranchers around here somewhere.)

And don't take offense when Jesus speaks of "eating and drinking" of the body and blood of the Son of Man. If we eat ONLY the things of this world then it will be "this world" that completely defines us, and directs us. You are what you eat. But if we eat the bread of eternity.

How many homes and families say this little prayer:

Come Lord Jesus be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed.

Dear Lord God, who is our bread, may all the world be clothed and fed. Amen.

Jesus says in today's Gospel – "Those who eat my flesh abide in me and I in them." So, the choice is yours: "Bread of Life" or Junk food? We pay attention to healthy food, and physical nutrition. Why not to our spiritual life? Our soul?

Jesus comes in many and various ways - the "gospel" preached & proclaimed in the midst, the sacraments: Christ is present in Word & Sacrament – the water poured, and the bread broken. Our words and actions of compassion -- feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and those in prison, sheltering the homeless, working for peace, justice and reconciliation. Welcoming all people. But it starts with Jesus – broken and poured out for the life of the world. And that includes you and me. And if we "are what we eat" then we too become bread for the world.

What 'fed your soul' last week? Your spirit? Was it a good book? Conversation with a good friend? A quiet walk in the woods?

What "junk food" did your spirit eat last week? What do YOU think of, when you hear Jesus say, that his flesh and blood are "true food" and "true drink"?

"True Food" = "Real food"; Clean Food; Food as it should be. Panera. "Rules to live by". Rally Day - "Rules to live by" - eat some good food, every day, and each Sunday of the coming year.

Deut. 6 (just like Moses said!) "LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. KEEP THESE WORDS that I am giving you in your heart. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home - when you are away - when you lie down - when you rise. Bind them as a sign upon your hand, fix them on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house; and on your gates.

Parents - you are Teachers. What are you to teach? That God is ONE; and that you are to LOVE this ONE GOD - with heart and soul and mind and strength. And you teach that to the next generation.

May the blessing of Jesus, and the presence of his life, fill us this coming year.

Amen.