

In our Gospel today we move from being physically fed by Jesus in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, to hearing his words about a much greater gift he wants to share with us: the gift of himself as the Bread of Life.

That's quite a jump, especially when we take note of the words which follow that promise: "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. He who believes in me will never thirst."

Surely he is talking about more than food and drink, about satisfying our physical need of everyday sustenance. Perhaps we should take note of a way we have of expressing ourselves in our own language. For example, in English we have a turn of phrase which says that when someone has a special aptitude or skill, that this is like 'bread and butter' to him or her, by which we mean that that person is so used to the thing she or he is doing that it's become like second nature to them. When you see a real tradesman at work, or a skilled computer technician, you wonder how with a few deft movements they can accomplish what would take you ages to work out.

That's what Jesus must have meant when he told his listeners: "Take me, take me as your bread in life, Take me, as the bread my Father is sending you from heaven. Take me as the principle that will lead you through life from day to day and from hour to hour." For, if we take him as our bread and butter in life, we will always choose what is good for the world, what is good for humanity, and what is good for us all.

To accept life in this way, may require a major shift in our perception. It demands that we challenge the trivialities which, at present, we hold as essential to our happiness, and re-evaluate the priorities we have. St. Paul, in our second reading today, has good reason to

encourage the Christians of Ephesus, to "put off your old nature" and "put on the new nature" we need to develop new attitudes about what life is all about, and what it is that we really need for our fulfillment and happiness.

To get the right answers, we have to ask the right questions. What really is essential to our well-being? What basically do we need to feel good about ourselves? How can we best get along with other people? If we can answer simple questions as these, we will know all there is to know about living happily and effectively. Jesus spoke endlessly about the importance of love, of not living for possessions, of being content to let God's will unfold in creation, of simplicity, and of living in service of our fellow human beings. The masterfulness of Christianity is that it does have all the answers to the essential needs of the human heart.

A good lesson in what is essential comes from the recent bushfires in Greece and in the United States. What's mentioned by the survivors of those tragedies as really important are not the homes and possessions they lost, but their lives, the people they loved, the love and support of people around them, the people who came to help in their immediate needs, - these were the things that really mattered and gave them the courage to look life in the eyes again.

And that goes for us as well. Concentrate on what is really essential in your life. Don't exaggerate what you need. Realize that you make life complex with inflated expectations, and complicate it by turning luxuries into necessities. What do you really need to be happy? Simplify life a bit. Try, for example, to make love the one rule for the way you deal with all other people. Trust that God loves you and cares for you with infinite compassion, even in the smallest details of your life. If you can live with these essentials and not be intimidated by all the things that don't really matter in life, Jesus' claim that you will never hunger or thirst again is not simplistic at all.