



Bringing Home the Word



18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 3, 2014

God's Free Samples

By Janel Esker

I love free samples—perhaps a little too much. You'll find me happily munching away at the grocery-store sample tables, wondering if I'll get another sample if I come back wearing sunglasses or a hat. My friends tease about my ability to make a whole meal from the samples at a big discount store on a Saturday afternoon. I can't help it—I love free food!

Perhaps that's why today's Scriptures appeal to me so. Isaiah voices God's free offer of water, grain, wine, and milk to

the hungry and thirsty. Jesus miraculously feeds more than 5,000 people, who pay nothing for the meal. These sound like the ultimate free samples.

As we know, the free samples at grocery stores are teasers intended to leave us wanting more and lead to the purchase of some item we can't live without. But God's free samples aren't limited to a tiny cup of juice or a minuscule bite of pizza. The nourishment God offers isn't a teaser that leaves us hungry—it's an all-you-can-eat, life-giving feast. Isaiah declares that God provides free food to draw us into deeper relationship "to make with you an everlasting covenant." We're not asked to buy something but to listen to and heed God's word, which leads to life.

So, too, in the Gospel, Jesus insists there is "no need for them to go away," though he came to a deserted place to be alone. He welcomes the burgeoning crowd into a deeper relationship through listening to and being fed by him. God is constantly welcoming us into a deeper relationship of trust, commitment, and love. It's up to us to step up to God's free-sample table, listen to God's word, and discover God's abundant gifts for us. †

SUNDAY READINGS

Isaiah 55:1–3

The Lord invites all people to come to him. Those who heed God are promised life in addition to the goods of this world.

Romans 8:35, 37–39

Saint Paul declares that nothing will separate us from the love of God: neither the forces of this world, things of the eternal realm, time, nor death itself.

Matthew 14:13–21

After a long day of healing and teaching, Jesus is approached about the crowd's impending hunger. Finding five loaves and two fish, he feeds them all, with baskets of food left over.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What else, besides or in addition to food, is abundant in your life?
- How can you more deeply believe in and seek God's endless love, care, and mercy?



Lord,

Your love and compassion
are always with us
in times of trouble.
Help me walk in
solidarity with those
who are suffering
and show them your
love and compassion.

~

*From Faithful Meditations for
Every Day in Ordinary Time,
by Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney*

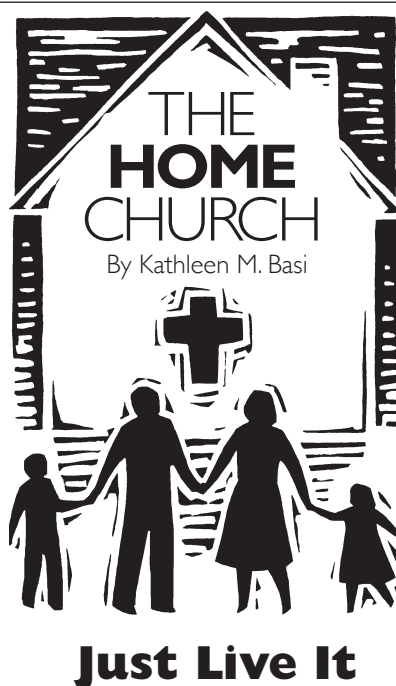
Fortifying yourself against bitterness

We live in a messed-up world: Countries pursue weapons that could wipe out the planet. Parents turn guns on their children. We justify derision, bigotry, and violence in the name of God. Young people objectify themselves and their peers because they lack good models of how to give and receive love.

The problems are easy to identify. What's hard is figuring out what to do about them. They're big, sprawling, and tightly woven. Where do I begin? What's the right plan of action? How can lowly little me, with my couple of hundred social-networking friends, interrupt the momentum of this juggernaut?

My impotence angers me. I'm jaded by the partisan bickering that ensures nothing ever gets solved. I'm tempted to throw up my hands and write off the future altogether. What do my actions matter, anyway, amid so much brokenness, so much willful ignorance? But when I spend my energy on anger, I cease to recognize the beauty, the potential for good, that also exists and is sometimes intertwined with the bad. The voices shouting vitriol, anger, narcissism, and greed drown out the whisper of the divine.

I bury myself in self-righteous judgment until, without realizing it, I become part of the problem instead of the solution. I go looking for a safe, insulated enclave, where the problems can't reach me, where I'm absolved of the duty to act, but it's usually uncomfortable. It's easier to stand back and complain



than to dig in, get my hands dirty, and risk learning—through abject failure or mediocre success—how small I really am. I think this is why St. Paul tells us to contemplate what is true and pure: What I focus on determines my reality. If I wrap my worldview in anger, I leave no room for kindness and compassion. But if I fix my sights on all that is good and holy, I'm fortified against the bitterness and disillusionment that might otherwise cripple me as I fight the unwinnable battle against the effects of sin. After all, let's face it—as Henri Nouwen observed, the world will always be dark. My efforts aren't going to change that.

Fortunately, God doesn't look at the bottom line when measuring my job performance. As Mother Teresa famously said, "My job is not to succeed, but to be faithful to my mission." †



The Redeemer, Mary, and You

By Br. Daniel Korn, CSSR

Icons have been described as windows into the Divine Mystery. The vast amount of gold in the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is striking. It does more than highlight objects and the folds of the garments. It represents the light of God coming through the icon, radiating to those who pray before it.

Mary presents the essential message of the Gospel: Jesus Christ's redeeming love for us. Through our prayer and reading of the icon, we must become messengers of God's healing love to the world, imitating the life and virtues of Jesus and Mary. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17). †

WEEKDAY READINGS

August 4-9

Mon. *St. John Vianney: Jeremiah 28:1–17 / Matthew 14:22–36*
 Tues. *Dedication of Basilica of St. Mary Major: Jeremiah 30:1–2, 12–15, 18–22 / Matthew 14:22–36*
 Wed. *Transfiguration of the Lord: Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 / 2 Peter 1:16–19 / Matthew 17:1–9*

Thu. *St. Sixtus II and Companions, St. Cajetan: Jeremiah 31:31–34 / Matthew 16:13–23*
 Fri. *St. Dominic: Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1–3, 6–7 / Matthew 16:24–28*
 Sat. *St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross: Habakkuk 1:12–2:4 / Matthew 17:14–20*