

[Deut. 8:2-3, 14b-16a; Psalm 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; John 6:51-58]

In 1993, the year I became a pastor for the first time, McDonald's sold its 100 billionth hamburger. No connection between the two events! Because only two digits fit on their existing signs, it was decided to permanently install the count at McDonald's as "Over 99 Billion Served." The hamburger is far from dead meat.

By comparison: How many times have you and I shared in the meal that offers us life everlasting? The cradle Catholic who receives First Eucharist at age seven or eight and continues to be faithful to the weekly liturgy stands a chance of participating in this sacred feast some 4,000 times during an average life, give or take holy days.

If you're a daily Mass-goer, make that upwards of 25,000 Very Happy Meals. Yet there's no contest to beef up our numbers.

Yet a single "full, active, and conscious" act of participation in the Eucharist brings us hope of eternal life. That sounds great for later; but eternal life actually means the fullness of life starting *here and now*. If you want it, this table is about to be set and you're invited. The Body and Blood of Christ isn't only something we "get" at every Eucharist. It's also what we *become*. We *receive* Christ. We *become* Christ. And we go forth to *bring* Christ out to a world in great need of this food.

Our society is dying of a thousand unnamed hungers; society still is heading out day after day, generation after generation, for the happy meals of wealth, power, and privilege; romance, sensation, addiction; entertainment, amusement, any kind of distraction -- hoping for satisfaction from all these. Those meals serve billions, it's true. But the reason the world keeps serving them up is because we're bound to return, with empty plates and emptier spirits. It really never satisfies us for long.

Our hungers, whether physical, emotional, social, or spiritual, can all tend to blend together. The nutritionists are right: We ought to become clear about the true nature of our hungers. How would you describe your deepest spiritual hunger?

Spiritually, what do you need the most? What spiritual food would be most satisfying? How is this nourishment available to you? Come the table...

Hungry hearts are all around us. Those mourning the loss of a loved one, in need of a job, desperate for wise counsel, unable to curb an addiction, angry and bitter.

Hungry hearts may be unforgiven or unforgiving, in poor health, worried about finances, unhappy in a relationship, unsure of their commitments, hard on themselves, afraid of the world around them, and the list goes on and on. These are the people Jesus offers to feed -- not with a temporary fix (which is usually what most of us want) -- but an everlasting source of sustenance that can be found in the change of heart that happens each time we gather to share a meal in Jesus' Holy Name.

Of course, Jesus feeds us when we approach the table of the Eucharist worthily and without sin. "Don't forget what the Lord has done for you." Those were Moses' last words to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land without him. "Don't forget what the Lord DOES for you."

And now, some thoughts on this Father's Day.

A doting father used to sing his little children to sleep. He even learned a few lullabies to lend some variety to the task. Unfortunately, he sang badly and out of tune. But this was something he could do at night to help out his wife. And he kept up this task until one night he overheard the older child say to the younger one this advice: "If you pretend you're asleep, he stops." That was the end of the lullabies.

People tell me things from the shadowy corners of their souls, and without violating confidences, I'd like to share them with you.

There is a broad spectrum of fathering. A friend's brother was recently left unexpectedly by his wife who took their young daughter with her. I'm picturing this man who would like nothing more than to see his family healed and restored; but on this Father's Day he is awakening to an empty house; there will be no dear young arms hugging him or young lips kissing his face. He is but one of many for whom *this* Father's Day is different from years past.

Here is church today, we have men: men who are faithful husbands and fathers; other men who found out years later of children they never knew who were aborted (and they wonder about them today); who have regrets in the ways they parented; men who became first-time dads and RADIATE joy like the sun.

Men who lost children or grandchildren this year and the ache is so profound words are inadequate; who walk the paths of infertility but are supposed to be “the strong one;” men who aren't providing for their families in ways that they want; who encouraged their children to be aborted; who had horrific fathers but who are doing the best that they can.

Men are here today who love fathering and walk honorably in that role; who are co-parenting and are not able to be with their children as much as they want; who are estranged from their children both relationally and physically; who lost their father this year and feel like orphans; who did not grow up with good fathers and it has impacted their view of God as Father.

There are step-fathers, fathers-in-law, adoptive fathers, biological fathers, foster fathers, spiritual fathers and mentors. David had his mighty men and we have mighty, brave men in our midst too!

On this Sunday during which we especially thank God for the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of His only begotten Son in the Most Holy Eucharist, we especially thank all fathers who reflect the Image of God to us: by protecting new life, encouraging those on their path, and living with the tension of providing both freedom and a safety net. One of the great joys in life is watching fathers delight in their children. In him (and in my own father), I see a picture of the way God delights in us and allows men to reflect that aspect of Him.

Let us pray for those fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice. Let us pray for those fathers who, by their own account, were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support. Let us pray for those fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.

Let us pray for those fathers, who despite divorce, have remained in their children's lives. Let us pray for those fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.

Let us pray for those fathers who, as step-fathers, freely choose the obligation of fatherhood and earned their step-children's love and respect. Let us pray for those fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold their child in their heart.

Let us pray for those men who have no children, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.

Let us pray for those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors and guides. Let us pray for those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.

And let us pray for those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and whose love continues to guide us.

After Mass today, members of our local council of the Knights of Columbus will be handing out to each man a very special book. It is a pastoral letter, written by the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, Bishop Thomas Olmstead. It was written for each man of his diocese. It applies to each man in this diocese as well! He asks three questions: 1. What does it mean to be a *Christian man*? 2. How does a Catholic man *love*? 3. Why is fatherhood, fully understood, so crucial for every man?

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday at noon, 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

Never underestimate a father's love. Never underestimate your child's need for a father's love. It could provide the best meal for a lifetime. Come to the table of Life.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul harkens back to the Jewish Passover meal when he makes reference to the four cups. In the Passover meal, the cup that St. Paul refers to is the one that is to be offered and drunk by the Messiah when he comes. Yes, Jesus IS the long-awaited Messiah! And YOU and I are blessed and worthy to drink from that same blessing cup! Take and eat. Take and drink. Then go... and BECOME the Body of Christ for our hungry, hungry world! AMEN!