

[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."

In a recent letter to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Pope Francis reminds all of you folk -- especially those to be received into the Catholic Church this weekend -- to develop your role as a lay person in the world. You are NOT "second class members" after clergy and religious, but instead you participate in Christ's priestly role through your own work in the world. Francis says that lay people "participate, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ himself. You are called to animate every space, every activity, and every human relation according to the Spirit of the Gospel.

"You bring light, hope and love received from Christ in His Word and Sacrament to those places that, otherwise might remain unknown to the action of God and abandoned to the misery of the human condition. No one can carry out better than you this essential work to see that the Divine Law is inscribed in the life of the Earthly City."

The work of the Church is not reserved to some "mission professionals," but is meant to be undertaken by all. We are all called to make holy the family, the home, the parish, and the world in which we live by our holy examples of service and integrity of life, by proclaiming the Gospel, by speaking of how God works in our daily lives.

St. Pope John Paul II, said it even more simply: "You can go and preach and witness in places where I cannot. I can bring Jesus Christ on the altar and into the bread and wine; you can bring Jesus Christ into the world with your hands, your feet and your heart. With your very lives." Get to work! AMEN!