

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B

August 5, 2012 10:30am and 12 noon

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Needs as Motivators

Several years ago I came across a book by a social psychologist named Douglas McGregor.

McGregor's book is about motivation in the workplace. He holds that, in the workplace and in life in general, our human needs serve as motivators.

McGregor says that our human needs are the reason we move toward a higher goal. He divides these into lower needs and higher needs and then draws an interesting contrast between them.

Lower needs are things like salary, food, and shelter. Higher needs are things like self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and relationships.

The lower needs differ from the higher needs because there's a point where the lower needs get relatively satisfied and then they no longer really satisfy us. Then satisfaction only comes from the higher needs.

For example, money and a nice home and good food – these things only satisfy to a point. But unfortunately, instead of moving to the higher needs of self-esteem, self-fulfillment and relationships, we sometimes get stuck in the lower needs.

We may think that more of them, like more money or a bigger home, is better and will make us happier. But this is not the case because these will never satisfy us as our higher needs will.

Jesus: Higher Needs

Being stuck in these lower needs is where Jesus finds the people who are looking for him in today's gospel.

Jesus says: "*You are looking for me not because you see signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled*" – this is a reference to Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 in last week's gospel. And then Jesus says: "*Do not work for food that perishes*" – food that satisfies a lower need.

Instead, "*Work for food that endures for eternal life*" – food that satisfies a higher need. And then Jesus identifies three sources for this enduring or imperishable food that satisfies our higher needs.

Imperishable Food

First, Jesus stresses that real satisfaction comes from relationships and not from things. He says: "*I am the bread of life.*"

Underneath this statement is the truth that what is more important in life is persons and not things. We need to put our energy into relationships because they will satisfy us in ways that material things never can.

It might be the relationship with your spouse or best friend or with your son or daughter or parent. Or it might be relating in a respectful and fair way with someone at work.

And then, Jesus gets very specific about the relationship that is most important for satisfying our higher needs. He says: "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger.*"

In other words, human relationships are important and we need to give priority to them. But there is an even fuller satisfaction that comes from a relationship with Jesus.

A relationship with him through personal prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments will bring us an inner and lasting satisfaction. And beyond that, this relationship with Jesus can positively affect our other relationships and make them all the more satisfying.

The third source of imperishable bread that Jesus identifies is really the glue that holds all of them together. The people ask, "*What can we do to accomplish the works of God?*"

And Jesus answers, "*Believe in the one he sent.*" So, faith is the glue.

With faith, we live with a vision that there is the Creator who made us and to whom we will return; that there is the Savior who offers us the light and love and life that deep down we all want; and that there is the Holy Spirit of God who is always with us. This faith is the glue for our earthly journey and brings us a great inner satisfaction.

Conclusion

So, Jesus call us to see the visible bread – the miracle of the loaves and even the bread of the Eucharist – to see this as a sign of the imperishable food that he gives us.

He calls us to seek 1) relationships and 2) himself and 3) faith as the food that will satisfy our highest human needs. If we do this, then we are seeking "*food that endures for eternal life.*"