

John 6,51-58 Jesus the Bread of Life.

15 August 2021 CCO and online

Father, we come to you now. Feed us with your Word, that we may grow in faith and love and understanding, that our lives may give glory to you. Through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wonder if you have ever been hungry, I mean really hungry, to the point where you would do anything just to be able to put something in your stomach? Fortunately, most people in this country don't suffer from that kind of extreme hunger. We are the lucky ones.

But for the people that Jesus was speaking to, the possibility of real hunger would have been a live issue. When you think about it, food, feeding, bread and hunger crop up over and over in the Bible. Jesus surprises his listeners when he says "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled". Clearly Jesus was speaking about something that everyone would recognise.

In our wealthier, western societies, we often have a different kind of problem. Many people are overweight and suffer ill health as a consequence. Many people are malnourished: they put things into their stomach, but not the sort of things that will make them strong and healthy. We've even coined the term Junk Food to describe what all too many people live on, because it's cheap and it's tasty – sort of – and it's quick and easy. It can make us feel satisfied – for a bit. But it isn't really doing us any good. It fills our bellies without feeding our bodies. It isn't the real thing.

And we have developed other unhelpful habits too, where hunger is concerned. We like to snack, to graze, having a bit of something just when we feel like it, something quick and easy. Then, when it comes to proper meal times we might not be really hungry, so we don't eat enough of the proper food when it is there before us.

We may, on the other hand, spend a lot of time and effort feeding our bodies. Cooking programmes on TV seem to be really popular. But how much time and attention do we give to the feeding of our soul?

What are you feeding your soul on? Do you just grab a quick bite of something here and there, not worrying too much about what it might be? Are you saturated with some of the trashy stuff on social media and TV, so that there isn't space in your life for the really nourishing stuff?

Do we expect God just to spoon-feed us, when it's convenient for us? How much effort are we prepared to put into making sure that our souls are fed with wholesome, nourishing food? We know that for our souls, the only real thing, the only real food is Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Word of God. This food is there ready and waiting for us to come and enjoy. We know it will satisfy, if we just make the effort to pick it up, chew it, digest it. We know that we need to keep feeding on Jesus, reading our Bible in a deeply listening way, so that the words can sink right into our hearts. We know all this, but we struggle to do it. There are so many other pressures on our time. But we have to remember that this really is the most important thing. Jesus, we know, was steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, he knew them inside out and back to front from a young age and through the working of the Holy Spirit he had let them shape all his thinking and understanding; he is our example. We need to do the same.

My mother-in-law was a nurse, and I remember her telling me that, in her day, the people most likely to suffer from stomach ulcers were firemen, because they were always getting called out, missing meals and having to snatch a bite at odd times. There was no regular pattern to their mealtimes, and their bodies suffered because of that. We know, as Christians, that there is nothing better than daily, disciplined time spent feeding on Jesus, in prayer and worship, Bible reading or study. The old monastic orders had 7 set times of prayer a day, to keep them walking closely with God. Most of us certainly will not manage that!

But we can all manage a short time of prayer, morning and evening. And perhaps a quick word of thanks at lunchtime, recognising God's presence with us in the busyness of our everyday lives. Give us this day our daily bread, that's what Jesus taught us to pray. The bread we need just for today. We don't get a year's supply or even a week's supply all in one go. You can't have a bulk order of the Bread of Heaven. You have to come, daily, humbly, and receive it from the hands of God himself.

Another way of feeding on him is the Eucharist, as Jesus explains in our Gospel reading today. We take his very being into our own bodies, deliberately, consciously, taking our Lord into our hands and taking Him right into ourselves, trusting that his presence inside us will nourish us, will satisfy us, will make us grow, will keep us strong and healthy Christians. When you hold the wafer, the Bread of Life in your hand, remember it is Jesus himself coming to you, coming *into* you. It is an awesome thought.

And while the Eucharist is where we come to offer ourselves to be filled with the Lord Jesus, it doesn't only happen in Church. Just as Jesus fed the five thousand out on the hillside, we can be fed in many ways and different places. The other name we have for the Eucharist is Holy Communion, when we enjoy a time of communion with God and with one another. And that can happen anywhere, over even the simplest meal, as we open ourselves to recognising the presence of Christ in each other as we share. We can also experience moments of deep communion when we help each other, listen to one another, get alongside another in times of sorrow or hardship. In all these soul encounters, Christ is present. At such times we are feeding on him in our hearts, by faith with thanksgiving, as we say in our Eucharist.

When our body is hungry, our stomach starts to rumble and tells us that we need food, and we eat. In the same way, we need to learn to listen to our soul when it is telling us that we are running on empty and we need to be fed with the word and with the life of God. Are you hungry? Are you listening to the rumbling of your soul? Do you

recognise your need to be filled, to be satisfied? If so, don't delay. Decide right now to sort out your spiritual diet and let God feed your soul. It costs you nothing, but a bit of time. You don't have to go to the supermarket, or spend hours in preparation; just come, come to Jesus with open hands and an open heart, a willingness to receive the good things God is longing to feed you with. Come and be filled, and know that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are truly blessed. Amen.