

If I had to entitle this homily, it would be: “Get a life!”

After not seeing one another in a while, we usually greet them with, “How are you doing?” It’s a common question, one we ask and are asked fairly often. The standard answers we give them: “Fine. I’m doing well. Things are really busy right now. I’m good.”

We might be fine and busy, getting our work done, meeting deadlines and commitments, fulfilling obligations and the like, but there is a difference, a vast difference, between doing life and having life within us.

*Doing life or having life; that’s the issue Jesus is concerned about. That’s the focus of today’s gospel. It is important enough that it is the unspoken question behind today’s gospel: Is there life within you?

That’s a hard question and one which many will avoid or ignore. “Fine,” “busy,” “good,” and “doing well” do not answer the question. They cover it up. The question pushes us to discover the hunger within us and the life Jesus wants to feed us.

Earlier in this gospel 5000 hungry people showed up. They were fed with five loaves and two fish. They didn’t understand. They thought it was about loaves and fish. It was really about life and where life comes from.

Jesus then challenges us to consider the bread that we eat. Is it perishable bread or does it endure to eternal life?

+You know those signs you see when you visit a park, “Please do not feed the animals.” Often, they are there because there were cases in which the animals would no longer eat their natural food and dying because of it.

We need a sign: “Unless you eat the flesh and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.”

This is the only way we ever have life within us. Jesus is very clear and blunt about it. His flesh is true food and his blood is true drink.

Any other diet leaves us empty and hollow, hungry and bereft of life. Those are ominous words, words that haunt and challenge us to consider whether there is life within us.

Obviously, Jesus is talking about more than just physical or biological life. He’s talking about that life that is beyond words, indescribable, and yet we know it when we taste it.

We get a taste of it when we love so deeply and profoundly that everything about us dies, passes away, and somehow we are more fully alive than ever before. We were tasting life. There are moments when time stands still and we wish the moment would never end. In that moment, we are in the flow, the wonder, and the unity of life, and it tastes good.

+I think about ordinations, where the young men are prostrating on the floor, eating and tasting true life, a life that matters. Or a couple, exchanging their vows and nothing else matters in that moment but one another and their love.

Perhaps some of us should ask ourselves, "What am I doing with my life?" Is this all there will ever be? Is this as good as it gets? We lament at what has become of us and our life. Nothing seems to satisfy. We despair at what is and what we think will be.

+Will Willimon and his wife went to a funeral in a little country church not of their denomination. The casket was open, and the funeral consisted of a sermon by their preacher.

The preacher pounded on the pulpit and looked over at the casket. He said, "It's too late for Joe. He might have wanted to get his life together. He might have wanted to spend more time with his family.

He might have wanted to do that, but he's dead now. It is too late for him, but it is not too late for you. There is still time for you. You still can decide. You are still alive. It is not too late for you."

On the way home, Willimon says to his wife, "Have you ever seen anything so insensitive to that poor family? I found it disgusting." She replies, "I've never heard anything like that. It was disgusting. It was insensitive. Worst of all, it was also true."

Too late for Joe, but not for us....

Those questions and feelings are not so much a judgement on us, but a diagnosis of us. They are symptoms that there is no life in us. We are dying from the inside out.

There is, however, treatment for our condition and food for our hunger. Life in Christ, not death in the wilderness, is our destiny.

The flesh and blood of Christ are the medicine that saves; what St. Ignatius called "the medicine of immortality." One dose, however, is not enough. We need a steady diet of this sacred medicine, this holy food. (Try just skipping a day from eating and drinking perishable food and see how that works out for you.)

Jesus is our medicine and our health. He is our life and the means to the life for which we most deeply hunger. Wherever human hunger and the flesh and blood of Christ meet, there is life.

In the eating and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood he lives in us and we live in him. We consume his life that he might consume and change ours. When we eat and digest his life, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his way of being and seeing, his compassion, his presence, and his relationship with the Father. We eat and drink our way to life.

+Let's say you're with a group on a mountain climb, with the goal of reaching the mountaintop. And your guide brings you to a cliff and shows you some ropes you will need to climb the face of a cliff.

Someone in your group might say, “Well, I’m not interested in rock-climbing. I’ll walk around to the side to find another way and meet you at the top.”

But what if the guide said, “You can’t. There is no other way. This is the only one.”

In effect, that’s what Jesus is saying here. He says, “I am the rope.” “I am the way and the truth...I am the living bread...it’s my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. There is no other route or path to the top. It’s the only way. Otherwise You have no life in you.”

You see, this is what defines us as Catholic. Now is the time, now we have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to what is real, to what lasts, to what alone can truly be called life.