

I find it interesting the way words change meaning and morph over time. For example, at one time when we used the word *text* to tell of our Sunday morning gospel, we could count on the fact that people would interpret it as a **passage** from one of the gospels. However, the meaning of the word *text* has changed remarkably with the invention of iPhones and droids and the myriad of communication devices we now have available for our use. In fact, the word *text* has morphed from a noun to a verb as we talk about *texting* our friends and family members.

Another word that has morphed in meaning over decades is the word *consumption*. For most of us, consumption refers to consuming food and “stuff.” This word comes from Latin and means “using up” or “wasting.” In fact, at one point in time it became a word used to describe the horrible disease known as tuberculosis, a disease that had no cure, devoured the body and was usually fatal. However, over the past century, the word *consumption* has morphed and is now a universal term that describes what we purchase and our patterns of purchasing.

I thought about this morphing of the word *consumption* as I studied today’s gospel passage. Jesus had just miraculously fed a crowd of thousands. Last week we heard that Jesus had blessed a scarce

commodity of five loaves and two fish and then, miraculously, there was an abundance of food. In fact, after the people had consumed as much as their bellies could hold, they were amazed to find food leftover. And, that experience made them even more curious and inquisitive about this Jesus.

So, with today's gospel passage, things start to get **more** interesting. When the crowd meets Jesus the next day, they want to understand what happened. In response, Jesus does **not** answer their questions, but makes a statement that questions **their** motives for seeking him. He is looking at their deeper needs, not just the need to consume food. Perplexed by what has happened, the people simply do not get it. I can almost hear them saying in amazement, "Do it again Jesus, do it again!" Yet, Jesus provides **different** answers and they become more puzzled. The crowd comes asking about sustenance - about bread - and Jesus answers them with words **not** about bread that fills their bellies, but words that indicate he is talking about something much more than physical sustenance. In **him**, there is richness and food that endures and does not get used up!

As I studied this reading, I found myself asking if we can really relate to this story because, for most of **us**, the reality is that we are **not** going hungry. Or are we? Is it our hunger, a hunger deep within us that lies behind our insatiable need to consume more and more stuff? Is our

addiction to consuming symptomatic of a much deeper problem? And, does the fact that most of us live a life of comfort insulate us from our deeper needs? In fact, has our level of economic comfort **protected** us from feeling vulnerable, even making us **less** dependent on God?

We have become people who are trained to be consumers and our economic system is dependent upon our consuming. We are so deeply entrenched in consumption that the mall, Meijer, and Amazon have become the Meccas in our culture. Buying stuff, whether it is food, shoes, clothing, or cars, has become a kind of nourishment for us. It is as though our purchases become a part of us, as if the stuff we buy will give us energy and strength. Consequently, we live with the **illusion** that life is nourished through purchasing things, stuff. But, after the newness wears off, the stuff we purchase always leaves us wanting more.

Could it just be that the wasting disease of consumption has become an economic and, quite possibly, a spiritual disease within our culture? Could it be we live with the **illusion** that free competition and a malignant form of capitalism feeds others? It is an illusion because the fact is that self-interested consumption does **not** bring justice to those who are hungry and those who go without. And, could it possibly be that the waste produced by our insatiable need to consume is not only toxic, but is also

consuming us? Just think about what plastic has done to our oceans and the precious forms of life that exist in those waters. Just think about our addiction to fossil fuels and what that addiction is doing to our climate as it threatens the very existence of life on this planet. Is the consumption that is so present in our culture and in our lives devouring us? If our answer to these questions is, “Yes,” then where do we find the cure? Where do we find the antibiotic for this deadly disease?

Jesus said to the crowd, “**I am** the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus invites us to live into an alternative way of being. As we gather around this communion table each Sunday to eat and drink, we are nourished with the very life of God’s son. Though the portions are small, we are nourished with abundance, an abundance of grace and love. And, we are nourished, not by something we consume, but by one who welcomes us with open arms, by one with whom we **commune**.

Catholic theologian, William T. Cavanaugh, suggests:

The Eucharist tells another story about hunger and consumption. It does not begin with scarcity, but with the one who came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.....The insatiability of human desire is absorbed by the abundance of God’s grace in the gift of the body and blood of Christ...{And,} the consumer of the body and blood of Christ does **not** remain detached from what he or she consumes, but becomes part of the body. (*Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, p. 94-95).

In Jesus, we become part of the body of Christ and the act of consumption is turned inside out. We who are consumers become consumed by the love and grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and **we are changed**. Nourished by the body and blood of Christ, we are enabled to **live** that communion of grace everyday of our lives as we enter into the communities where we work, serve and play.

Now, I must say this way of life and being is not always easy. When we live life as members of the body of Christ we take the way of the Cross, a way that means a dying to self, and living for others. And, that way means that the pain of the hungry person, the pain of the world, and even the pain of a broken creation, are all the pain of Christ and therefore, that pain becomes **our** pain. But, we are fed by the one who not only went to the cross, but went through the cross to resurrection, bringing life and love to this very broken world. And, when we live this communion as one body in Christ, the love of God **empowers** us to do things like: feed the hungry, care for the sick, care for creation, and yes, care for and love our neighbors as ourselves so much that we do things like wear masks and get vaccinated because we can then protect others. This love of God also empowers us to work for justice and peace, and the very healing of all creation in this hurting, broken world.

**Consumption** kills and it is deadly, but **communion** is life giving. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has **invaded** not only our lives but the life of world. Jesus **is** the bread of life. And, when the body and blood of Christ is working **in** us and **through** us as we daily live compassion and love, God **is** transforming the world. So, come, be served. Jesus is the host and has spread a table before us. Eat and live into the abundance of God.