

## 5 Easter A

Franz Kafka, was the author of strange stories like *The Hunger Artist*. In this short story Kafka recognized the importance of satisfying his own spiritual hunger. He wanted his other works burned but insisted that this one story be saved.

In typically bizarre fashion, Kafka has the hunger artist making his living by professional fasting. He is the practitioner of a once venerated profession. Seated on straw in his small barred cage, he is marveled at by throngs of people. After forty days, his fasts were terminated in triumph. His manager would make a speech, the band would play, and one of the ladies would lead him staggering in his weakened state out of the cage.

However, the day arrived when fasting was no longer understood or appreciated by people. He lost his manager and had to join a circus. His cage was placed next to the animals. He became depressed by the smell, the restlessness of the animals at night, the raw flesh carried past him, and the roaring at feeding time. The people barely glanced at him in their hurry to see the animals. Even the circus attendants failed to limit his fast by counting the days. Finally, he was discovered lying in the straw, and in his dying breaths he told his secret: 'I have to fast,' he whispered. 'I can't help it. I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.'

Kafka was a writer of parables. He used these stories to explain his own life. The parable of the hunger artist is not about physical hunger but about spiritual hunger. Kafka was the hunger artist, and he realized he was starving to death spiritually, but he couldn't find any food he liked.

Turning 55 last year I have discovered the "Seniors" menu at IHOP. There is a lot you can buy for the money on this menu but what happens when you want a different diet? IHOP is waiting!

How do we satisfy spiritual hunger? The writer of Peter's letter suggests becoming a child again! Return to that state of mind when you were hungry and you went for mother's milk! Milk we know is extremely nourishing. It provides protein, carbohydrates and fat and Vitamin D. For some pure milk is whole milk. Once you get used to the taste it's difficult to drink the weaker stuff. Peter further writes that like milk people that have tasted how good the Lord is want more of what he gives to feed and nourish them.

Taking spiritual milk in its purest form begins to create a new kind of hunger. The letter of Peter promises that this milk will cause growth. Talk of eating makes us hungry and hunger if satisfied keeps us growing. Not to grow is to be immature and stagnant. Eventually if the soul like the body is not fed it's dead. What is this milk?

Just a few verses before chapter 2 of this first letter of Peter, we read, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." God gives us milk that cannot be destroyed. Nor will it spoil. However, it works best if used by a certain date. After all, hunger does eventually go away the longer you wait to eat. The spiritual milk we are given helps us grow and gives us an appetite for food that is heavier, sometimes called meat. God allows us to discover steak, French onion soup, Quiche, and chocolate mouse! When we are ready and can handle it, God gives us more!

From food metaphors, Peter moves on to construction of a house to explain how spiritual hunger leads to spiritual growth. Yes, he mixes his metaphors. He talks of Christ as the first "living stone" and we as "living stones" are invited to come to him. Jesus Christ is the **cornerstone**, the first stone laid at a corner of a building where two walls begin and form the first part of a new building. You will see the cornerstone of this building to the right of the red doors as you leave church.

Christ is the master craftsman, building himself a spiritual house from the people of God. In this spiritual house of "living stones," he is forming a holy priesthood. The priesthood was limited to a few men in the Bible; and one had to be related to get the job. No longer! Once a child of God is made alive by spiritual milk, a "living stone" is formed, fit for building material, fit for exercising his or her priesthood. The high priest, Jesus Christ is our personal trainer that will guide and mentor us in the ways we need to grow.

Jesus Christ is precious. We come to realize He is precious as we discover that He nurtures, feeds, disciplines and grows for God a chosen people and a royal priesthood fit for a King. It is very telling that Mary thought Jesus was the gardener on Easter Sunday. He wants to see that what he planted on that day will grow and mature.

Mature, complete, established Christians are spiritual people the world can turn to and depend on. They are people that have made good use of the gifts loaned to them by God. They are people who have taken the milk of God's written word and fed on him. They

are nourished and fed once again by God at the Holy Eucharist. Jesus bids us eat his body and drink his blood that we might have life in ourselves. Is there not more? Can we afford to stay “spiritual infants?”

Someone once described babies this way:

“A baby is a digestive apparatus with a loud noise at one end and no responsibility on the other.”

The baby is a completely dependent creature. It has needs that it cannot meet on its own.

You know, when it comes down to it, we all love babies, but we don't want them to stay that way.

If a baby doesn't grow and develop and progress, we know there is a problem.

When a church is satisfied with drinking only spiritual milk (and I admit that you won't get much more than milk from the pulpit) it will cease to grow. The people must go deeper.

The same is true of the Christian.

We have been born again. And as a Christian, we must eat the right food and drink, if we are to grow. God sees a great deal of promise and potential in our lives. He is waiting and hoping that we will grow up, be strong and produce much fruit in our lives. Are we tired of just milk?

There is meat and much more that God has for us.

Let us pray: Eternal Father, you have called us your children, but you never intended us to stay as infants. May the right food and drink be found by each of your people, to nourish and grow their faith. Where there is need for a fresh start, open our hearts to see the possibilities for learning. When it is time to leave spiritual milk behind for another kind of diet then teach us to chew the meat you give humbly and with thanksgiving. And as we grow let us remember that you have given us gifts to serve, to lead and to teach others by our words and our lives. Perhaps, in time, others will learn to feed on the milk you first gave us. This is your eternal plan – that the cycle of life would continue forever. It is your will that we bear much fruit. In all things may we give you praise, honor and glory. AMEN