

Sermon on John 6 47-51, 18.03.2007

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Text:

⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

Dear Congregation,

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever, that is what Jesus says. If you now think of what you are praying when you pray the Lord's Prayer, namely: Give us today our daily bread..., and combine those two statements, you have a remarkable statement: God give us our daily share of Jesus. I am pretty sure that none of you have ever understood the Lord's Prayer this way. If we talk about bread we might get hungry. But it may not come to mind that this petition deals with Jesus and eternal life, as well. Such topics as Jesus and Eternal life seem not to be as common to us as eating and drinking, sleeping, working, and doing the laundry. 'Jesus' and 'Eternal Life' are not something as common as - let's say - bread. But if we follow today's sermon text that is basically what it should be.

The problem is that we do not think of God as much as we think other for us important things. A poem from India might sound strange to us, in which it says: "Every day at noon in the heat of the day God comes to me in form of 200 grams of porridge. I notice him in every grain; I taste him in every spoonful I take in. I hold this meal with him, when I swallow. It is him who keeps me alive with 200 rams of porridge."

I assume we would not talk about God like this? Is God really our daily bread? Does he come to us as well at noontime every day?

I know, some of us pray on a daily basis, some have their little devotions, read the bible, but what we often do not achieve with all of this is that God does not have this natural, close, accepted place in our lives. We do not often see God at work in the day-to-day events of our lives. We think that most of those things are coincidences or results of deeds, or thing that this just happens. Nevertheless, it is God who leads us through space and time and sustains our live us every day. It God's hands form which we take our daily slice of bread, our bowl of soup, our three-course meal. It is God who wakes up with us every morning and who accompanies us to the bathroom. It is god who sits on the bed beside us when we dress and out on our socks. It is God who surrounds us, when we go on our way, and it is God who awaits us already when we come home. It is God who goes to bed with us and who lets us get up the next morning, his will permitting.

How understood is God's presence for all of us? How much do we wish to have God at our side, so that we could actually pray: God give us our daily share of Jesus today, our slice of faith, which lasts for the day and takes many burdens from our shoulders?

Jesus basically asks this question to his contemporaries. What aggravates me about this text is that it sounds so common, so unexciting, and so dry, like a dry piece of bread itself. Although this text talks about some very important and fundamental teachings of our faith: Jesus is the one who gives us our life, even if at some point our spoon, our fork falls out of our hands. Jesus that is what he says about himself is the live-giving power, the meaning of our life, something, he talks about later, which does not make us hungry again, if we eat from the bread he is. We should take a bite, we should absorb him. Someone once said to me that when

she comes for Holy Communion she goes home, knowing that a part of Jesus goes with her. I find this a wonderful explanation of this text as well.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

This is an incredible statement which does not really come to life when we only think of such a lifeless thing than a piece of bread. This goes way beyond it, because it talks about a real person, someone who has been killed through torture and had a gruesome death on the cross, through which he shows his true identity as the saviour of this world. He does not flee this death, he does not hide somewhere from it, but he accepts that fate that God had appointed him for – for our sake. This is something we try to fully understand anew on Good Friday, that this talks about the brutality and ferocity which happened to an innocent man who gets nailed to the cross on our behalf – and rises again after three days, which gives us some relief otherwise we would have a hard time to deal with this death. Although this as such could also make us speechless, that God in all his love for us and all his mercy awards us selfish and inhumane being with the most incredible gift someone could give to us – a unimaginably wonderful Eternal Life which we actually would not deserve in the first place.

The talk about the bread of life is something which should come really close to our hearts, dear congregation. This is not hot air, something which goes into one ear and leaves through the other without touching our brain. This text is meant to move us and to see that this statement saves in fact our life.

This message should supposedly influence all areas of our life. The hunger for more, for prestige, for revenge, for material goods ought to disappear when we heed this word on a daily basis.

The German author Wolfgang Borchert had told this story, called 'The Bread':

Suddenly she woke up. It was 2.30. She thought about why she had woken up. Oh yes! In the kitchen someone had bumped against a chair. She listened in the direction of the kitchen. It was quiet. It was too quiet and as she ran her hand over the bed beside her, she found it empty. That's what it was, that's what had made it so especially quiet: his breathing was missing. She got up and groped her way through the dark apartment to the kitchen. In the kitchen they met. The time was 2.30. She saw something white standing by the kitchen cabinet. She turned on the light. They stood facing each other in their shirts. At night. At 2.30. In the kitchen. The bread plate lay on the kitchen table. She saw that he had cut himself some bread. The knife was still lying beside the plate. And on the tablecloth there were bread crumbs. When they went to bed at night she always cleaned the tablecloth. Every night. But now there were crumbs on the cloth. And the knife lay there. She felt how the cold of the tiles slowly crept up her body. And she looked away from the plate. "I thought there was something here," he said and looked around in the kitchen. "I heard something, too," she answered. She did not look at him, because she could not bear that he lied. That he lied after they had been married for thirty nine years. They both felt their way across the dark hallway to the bedroom. Then it was quiet. After many minutes she heard that he was chewing quietly and carefully. She breathed deeply and evenly, on purpose, so that he would not notice that she was still awake. But his chewing was so regular that she slowly fell asleep because of it. When he came home the next evening she pushed four slices of bread over to him. Before he had only been able to eat three. "You can go ahead and eat four," she said and moved away from the lamp. 'I cannot take this bread all that well. Go ahead and eat one more. I can't take it all that well.'" She saw how he bent deeply over the plate. He didn't look up. At that moment she felt sorry for him.

The bread of life can not be eaten alone. So little someone may have of it, it needs to be shared. The bread of life can't satisfy people who eat it alone or secretly. The bread of life asks for community, in which it is given and taken. The bread of life needs to be shared in order to become enough to satisfy everyone.

In the last two weeks I have learned, how it is if we take the bread of life off our diet. I noticed about myself and others what happens in a conflict when we forget that God should be in our midst, if God is not our bread basket anymore. Things were said and done which were all too human, but were wrong altogether.

What could be learned from it is this: When God is not our daily bread, eaten by all around the table; there is no chance to understand each other and to love each other.

We can only forgive each other, if we know that God did everything, absolutely everything on his part to forgive us. We can only overcome our pain and disappointments, when we do not only focus on ourselves, but feel that we are part of a bigger family in which we look into the eyes of people who are created in God's image. If Christ is the bread of life than this should form and unite us into one body. 1. Corinthians 10, 17: *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

⁴⁸*I am the bread of life.*

The very first Christians knew that and followed this message carefully. They have gathered around tables, broke bread, celebrated the Holy Communion and held meals together. Bread was their spiritual nourishment as it was a means to help other by giving them a share of it. Bread was a symbol of Christian community. Today this must become a symbol again, but not only for Christians, but for the worldwide community. The world needs to gather around the table, at which people can fill their stomachs, at which the resources are shared and solutions for the most pressing problem of this world – hunger – is sought. I have read that people in Canada consume roughly 100 Lbs. of bread a year in average. At least once a day people eat one slice of bread. This must become possible everywhere else as well. With Africa a whole continent of this world is hungry.

I have learned that the Russian word for hospitality is a combination of the two words for 'salt' and 'bread'. The hospitality of our churches is not only geared to meet the physical needs of people, the obvious wants, that people are hungry. We also have to care for the inner needs of people as well. We have to be the place where people also receive spiritual nourishment and be satisfied in their souls.

Our churches have to become granaries of faith, in which the faith of us people in the western hemisphere to fight the hunger in this world and to give people the spiritual equipment, the knowledge of our faith, which is aimed to share the bread from which we live ourselves, like the first Christians in Jerusalem did.

⁴⁸*I am the bread of life.*

This is a word for the meager years in life. The Holy Dominicus, the one who founded the catholic order which carries his name, told his brethren in time of trials and needs: "Let us think of our saviour!" – This is what this passage from the bible is all about: Think of your saviour because this is the way out in all the hardships of your life. We may run out of food, we might have little and find ourselves to be helpless; the important thing in those moments is that we still can feast on the abundance of this bread Jesus talks about. And even if the way right in front of us may be difficult and rough, this is our provisions for the road – the bread of life.

And the Peace of God which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.