

++++  
I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (ESV)  
++++

## ***"Satisfying a Hungry Heart"***

Do you hunger for the true meaning of life? Then you are not alone. All too quickly we discover that people, material possessions, and money do not give lasting satisfaction. Jesus offers Himself to you as the Living Bread from heaven. He alone can truly satisfy your hungry heart.

What do you think of when you hear the word "bread?" If you are from an older generation that word may bring back memories of the bread baking in the oven of your mother's or grandmother's kitchen.

If you are from my generation, the word "bread" would be the slang expression for the word "money."

In the Lord's Prayer we pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Martin Luther in his explanation to this Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer says: "Daily bread is everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body."

Jesus gives to us a totally different way of looking at bread. Jesus says in today's Gospel: "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever. This Bread is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

At first hearing, these words of Jesus are difficult at best to understand. Jesus takes this common everyday word "bread" to speak of Himself as giving nourishment for the life of all people.

When Jesus says "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven," it begs the question: Just who is this Jesus?

Yes, it begs the question into today's contemporary world. Who is this Jesus, and what is this Living Bread which comes down from heaven? The rejection of Jesus as the Son of God who gives His body into death for the sins of the world is present and alive today.

The hunger for spiritual satisfaction cries out from the sinful world in which we live. Popularity and interest in recent movies such as *The Passion of the Christ* and *The DaVinci Code* point to the fact that people are searching for answers to the meaning of life.

Do you know of Jesus, but consider Him to be a "bread

king?" Is this the Jesus who is God only in the sense of providing for the here and now? Just like the crowds that ate of the fish and loaves of bread, is Jesus the god that makes you successful and provides for all of your needs and wants of daily living? Is this the Jesus that you expect to heal your body of sickness and disease at the drop of a prayer? If that is your reasoning, then you do not have the Living Bread which comes down from heaven.

The crowds and religious leaders of Jesus' day saw Him only as a mere human being. They called Him "rabbi" which means "teacher." If Jesus is no more than a mere moral teacher who gives great spiritual advice whenever you are "down in the dumps," then this is not the Jesus which is the Living Bread which comes down from heaven! This is not the Jesus that you and I can take at "face value" and then go on with our daily living.

Allow me to illustrate. I recently received an email that informed me that I had won a Caribbean vacation. Not only did I win a cruise, but I had also won a vacation in Las Vegas, plus, as an additional bonus free use of a condominium in Florida! All this could be mine, but - in order to insure these winnings, a deposit would be needed by means of my credit card. It was a scam! Credit card fraud nicely packaged in the form of a "free vacation."

That is precisely how many see Jesus. His offer of real and lasting life is too good to be true. After all, nothing in this life is free! The devil, the sinful world around us, and our sinful hearts and minds want us to believe that Jesus is nothing more than a scam. This is a changing Jesus who does not last, and who gives earthly promises that do not last.

Thank God that this is not the true Jesus Christ. Listen again to the gracious promise of Christ in today's Gospel. Jesus says: "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever. This Bread is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world." With these words, Jesus offers to you and me the greatest gift that anyone could possibly possess in this life! Because the gift is eternal life! This is a costly gift, for Jesus says that He will give His flesh, His body, as a sacrifice, so that the whole world might have everlasting life through Him.

Yes, in these words is the story of Jesus giving His life for a world which is cursed by misery, sin, and eternal death.

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who enters this world as an infant. He is the very Son of God born of the virgin Mary. This is the little baby who lies in a manger in the town of Bethlehem. Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." Here is

Jesus for whom the angel proclaims: "For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who eats with sinners; who invites tax collectors, prostitutes, and the needy, offering to them new life in the forgiveness of their sins.

***This is Jesus***, the Bread of Life who drives out the evil spirits, who heals the blind, deaf, and lame. The Jesus who says to the paralytic man, Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well."

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who in the Garden of Gethsemane prays to God the Father and says: "Father if you are willing, remove this cup of suffering from Me, nevertheless not My will, but Your will be done."

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who gives His flesh for the life of the world as He hangs on the cross of death and says "It is finished!" and with these words your salvation is won.

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who has risen bodily and victoriously from the tomb of death. And again, we hear the words spoken by an angel: "He is not here. He is risen!"

***This is Jesus***, the Living Bread who came down from heaven, who has ascended into heaven, and who will return again as Judge of all at the end of time.

Yes, here is the Living Bread that gives eternal life. "Eat of this Bread and you will live forever," says Jesus. Remember, there were those who opposed Jesus and thought that they could get by in life with just earthly bread. That "here-and-now" kind of thinking only ends in despair and death. Jesus offers to you lasting peace and life forever in Him. In John the tenth chapter Jesus says: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Here the Savior is speaking about new life in Him. This is life that does not depend on the things and people of this world.

God places before you and me a choice of great contrast. The choice is between the Living Bread from heaven and the bread of this world. Again, recall the definitions of bread.

"Bread" can mean "food" or anything that we need or want for daily living. "Bread" also is the slang for "money." What is the bread for which you hunger?

If you are relying on the bread of this world to give satisfaction, meaning, and spiritual wholeness to your life, you will be greatly disappointed to discover that these things have no lasting value, and in the end cannot give eternal life.

Yes, Jesus offered lasting Living Bread to those who thought earthly bread was all that mattered. This same Jesus

offers Living Bread for your spiritual hunger. On the cross of Calvary Jesus died for your sins. At the tomb of death Jesus rose in victory so that you might have new life now and eternal life forever with Him. That new life is a free gift from God. You and I cannot receive this gift on our own terms. Saint Paul, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says in Romans chapter 6: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus freely offers you new life. That new life is for eternity, but it is also for your life today!

Are you burdened with sin and the guilt that accompanies sin? Do you hunger for release from sin's grip? Jesus offers to you forgiveness of sins. Yes, there is no sin too great that God cannot forgive. Jesus this day offers to clothe you with His holiness purchased and won for you by His death on the cross. That holiness becomes yours by the miraculous gift of faith which lays hold of the promises of Holy Scripture which is the very Word of God Word.

Are you burdened with the cares and concerns of this life? Do you hunger for strength and guidance? Jesus offers to you His presence, and the strength found only in the Bible. The prophet, in Isaiah chapter 55, declares: "Come, all you who are

thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." Isaiah, in the beautiful words of the Old Testament, looks forward to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and compares spiritual blessings with that of a great banquet. The bread of this world lacks in comparison to the riches found in Jesus Christ, the Living Bread which came down from heaven. He is the nourishment that gives eternal life. Amen.

And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.