

About to leave work Max answered his cell phone, "Can you stop at the grocery store," his wife asked, "and pick up some bread?" "Of course," he said. Like a knowing wife, she added, "Just stay focused, Max." She was rightly nervous; last sent to buy butter and milk, Max came home with buttermilk.

So Max parked the car at the market and entered the door. En route to the bread aisle, he spotted his favorite cereal, so he picked up a box, which made him wonder if they needed milk. He found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God's great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. He grabbed a pack of Oreos, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is, he thought, cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, he spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes he'd filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. He checked out and drove home. And then a few minutes later he was on his way back to the store. He forgot the one thing he went to get -- The one really essential product. He forgot the bread.

It is quite difficult for us, as Americans, to understand the importance of bread unless we turn on our TV and watch what is going on in so many parts of the world today. When there is no bread there is suffering and famine. A simple loaf of bread is something to which we do not give a second thought, but in certain parts of the world it means life itself.

Some the most significant events in the Bible revolve around the subject of bread.

The most important event in the Old Testament of course, was the Exodus event -- the trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. But what caused the Hebrews to be in Egypt in the first place? It was for want of bread. The wheat crop had failed due to draught, and the Hebrews had migrated to the land of the Pharaoh because there was a surplus in storage there. It was bread, or the lack of it, that initiated this whole chain of events.

Later, when the Jews were on their way to the Promised Land, and they were facing starvation in the bleak wilderness, God rained down "bread from heaven," as it was called, in the form of manna.

When Jesus began his ministry, he went into the dessert where he was tempted. As the hot sun braced down upon him, he looked out with sweaty eyes at the round white rocks, and we are told that they took on the appearance of loaves of bread. Satan was tempting Jesus to give bread to the people and end the suffering of world hunger. Yet, Jesus rejected that temptation because, he said, that man cannot live by bread alone.

Most significantly we remember bread because at Last Supper Jesus took a loaf of bread and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: **This is my body, which is broken for you.** You simply cannot escape the significance of bread throughout the length and breath of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Which brings us to the story this morning. Jesus had just fed the 5000 and His miracle has generated controversy. Moses was able to bring that bread from heaven and, since that time, there had been a strong belief among the Rabbis that when the Messiah came

he, too, would bring manna from heaven. This had been a super hero moment for Moses and surely, they reasoned, the Messiah could surpass that. In other words, the Jews were challenging Jesus to substantiate his claim of Messiahship by raining bread from heaven.

What Jesus did impressed them, of course, but they argued that he merely fed 5000 whereas Moses had fed a nation. Jesus, they said, you have fed these people for one day but Moses did it for 40 years. What you have done is multiply a few earthly loaves of bread and fish but Moses made it appear from out of nowhere. The messiah could certainly outperform the signs of Moses.

Jesus counters that Moses fed a basic physical need but the real bread from heaven answers our spiritual hunger as well. Jesus was saying that they were putting too much emphasis on physical bread. That is not to say that it is insignificant. Supplying physical needs is important. But while life in its most elementary form depends upon bread, bread only sustains life, it does not make life what God intended it to be.

In other words, bread has power but in the end its power will fail. Bread can buy you land but not love; it can buy you bonds but not brotherhood; gold but not gladness; hospitals but not health; houses but not homes. You can trade bread for commodities but not comfort, real estate but not righteousness, hotels but not heaven.

Recently, I received an e-mail that claimed to be about real signs found in the real kitchens of real people.

- "A messy kitchen is a happy kitchen and this kitchen is delirious."
- "A clean house is a sign of a misspent life."

- "If we are what we eat, then I'm easy, fast, and cheap."
- "My next house will have no kitchen, just vending machines."
- "A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand."

These sayings point to some of our society's attitudes about food: 'only junk food is enjoyable', 'food is meant to satisfy us', 'if I had to cook it, it doesn't taste good', and 'as long as it's not good for me, I should eat as much as I want'. We stuff ourselves, trying to fill the hole inside of us with food, as if we could eat something that would satisfy us. But we could stuff ourselves at every meal and still be hungry for something deeper!

Every parent understands this. We feed our children, we cloth them, we give them warm bed. But their needs go so much deeper than those physical things. They want to be loved and held. They want to play. They have a desire for knowledge. They hunger after new experiences. In short, they desire quality of life and not mere existence. That is what Jesus ultimately provides for us -- quality of life -- a way to get beyond ourselves and mere existence and experience life and an intensity of life that we have never otherwise experienced.

In one of her books, Mother Teresa wrote: "The spiritual poverty of the Western world is much greater than the physical poverty of [Third World] people. You in the West have millions of people who suffer such terrible loneliness and emptiness. They feel unwanted and unloved ... These people are not hungry in a physical sense but they are in another way.

They know they need something more than money, yet they don't know what it is. What they are missing really is a living relationship with God.”

Don't be like Max, the shopper – distracted by so many things but forgetting the most essential. To satisfy the longings that no ordinary food can satisfy, to experience that relationship with the Lord, to receive that bread from heaven -- that is why we gather today for this Eucharist.