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When we hear that Jesus cured the sick and fed the crowd, we say that he performed miracles. But the Gospel writers don't call them miracles; they call them signs. Signs point to something greater than themselves. But what is greater than curing the sick and feeding thousands with a few loaves of bread and some fish?

Psychologists speak of felt needs and unfelt needs. Two felt needs that we all have are for health and food. When we are sick, we want to be cured. When we are hungry, we want to eat. There are deeper needs, too, and we are not always aware of them.

We need to be healthy inside. We need to be honest, unselfish, responsible, caring persons...people of integrity. We need to be cured of dishonesty, self-centeredness, irresponsibility, greed. These are sicknesses of the spirit. These are sin. Jesus wants to restore us to health, if we'll let him. When he cured the physically sick, he gave us a sign that he has the power to heal us at our very core.

We need food, too. Not just for our bodies but also for our spirits, so that we can be the kind of people God meant us to be. When Jesus fed the crowd, he gave them and us a sign that he would give us another kind of food. The crowd he fed that day got hungry again; but if we eat the Bread of Life, he assures us that we will never be hungry again. That bread is right here ~~in this church~~ ^{in this church} ~~ambassador~~. Soon it will become the body of Christ, which we will take and eat.

There are people who seldom or ^(not show-us) never go to church; they're staying home today. Religion, for them, is not a felt need. They don't think they're missing anything, and they ^{may} wonder why we feel the need.

We who come to church cannot always put it
into words, but we're looking for something more. We want to
be healthy not only in body but also in spirit. We want to nour-
ish that part of ourselves that seeks a fuller life, open to the
infinite, open to God.

In the Gospel, Jesus enacts
God's promise to fill the hungry with
good food as he feeds a crowd of thou-
sands. This is not only an act of heart-
felt compassion, but it is also a politi-
cally subversive action. In Jesus' day, as
now, food is about power. The rich
who had control of land and the means
of food production and distribution,
who comprised about 2 percent to 3
percent of the population, were the
ones who ate well and plentifully. The
rest struggled daily to feed themselves
and their children. Taxes, pestilence
and drought often ate up their reserves
and left them at the brink of starva-
tion.

In today's world, there is easily
enough food for everyone and then
some. But not all have land enough
to grow food or sufficient income to
purchase it. In the Gospel, Jesus'
disciples presume that there is
enough food for everyone.

But they figure it is someone else's responsibility to provide it. They want to send everyone off to buy their own food thinking that everyone has money and that the surrounding villages have the resources to feed the multitude. Jesus directs them away from an impulse toward self-sufficiency to a solution that depends on remaining in community and pooling and redistributing their resources. In a eucharistic action he transforms all that they have, and there is enough.

The Gospel today invites us to resist the temptation to consider it someone else's responsibility to address the problem of world hunger. Jesus says to us: "Give them some food yourselves."

When we gather at the Eucharist, we not only give thanks for God's gifts received freely and abundantly, but together we seek to understand the causes of hunger and redouble our efforts to galvanize the church's energies toward aiding peoples and nations to take the drastic measures needed.

No one really knows the precise number of hungry people in our world, but the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates it to be 925 million—that is approximately one of every seven people. The vast majority are in Asia and the Pacific (578 million), then sub-Saharan Africa (239 million), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (53 million), then North East and North Africa (37 million) and, finally, some 19 million in developed countries. In 1996 the World Food Summit set out to reduce the number of malnourished people by half by 2015. Although there has been modest progress in some areas of the world, the number of hungry people has actually increased in the ^{Recent} past.

~~development.~~

We can do something in the United States

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for the hungry poor by becoming part of the Christian citizens' lobby known as Bread for the World.

Bread for the World's annual report one year bore the title, "Foreign Aid to End Hunger." It was able to predict the success of BFW's "Hunger to Harvest Resolution: A Decade of Concern for Africa." This was a concurrent House-Senate Resolution adopted by the Congress at the urging of Bread for the World. Through it, our nation went on record as wanting to increase effective aid to sub-Saharan Africa. This is not short-term food aid. It is not immediate relief. It is longer-term development assistance. We, as a nation, are committing ourselves to help poor countries build the infrastructure necessary for the production and transportation of food. The ultimate solution to hunger is the production of food in the food-deficit nations. And where food simply cannot be produced, it can be imported if appropriate trade and transportation arrangements are in place. All this, of course, presupposes political stability.

We here in the United States can practice both stewardship and citizenship by calling upon our representatives in government to do what we as a rich and powerful nation can do, namely, help poor countries to help themselves. This means debt relief and large injections of economic development assistance.

quote This is a "Moral Calling," says the BFW annual report for 2001:

"Ending hunger is a moral calling. The most important arguments for increasing poverty-focused development assistance are moral. A sense of moral obligation provides the push (the 'ought'); and a vision of happy, healthy people ('the common good') provides the pull."

"Moral sentiment rises partly from the realization that other people are just like us. When impoverished people get up in the morning they go through the same routines as people in the industrialized world—washing, eating, working, loving, and struggling. At night when they lie down, they too hope for a safe and secure tomorrow. In spite of cultural differences, we are all, ultimately, one human race." end of quote

So follow the public policy issues as well as the hunger and famine stories in the news. Let those for whom you vote know that you want development assistance and hunger reduction to be locked together in foreign policy. If you want more information, go to www.bread.org or locate Bread for the World in the phone book. Give them a call. ~~It~~
~~is~~ system.

Consider this kind of involvement to be your response to the direction Jesus gives in today's Gospel: "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves."

He came up with a ^{a sign} miracle in his day. Our day calls for another kind of ^{sign} miracle called citizen participation. It takes a little longer, but it also provides a long-lasting solution.