

Rev. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

8/2/09 "Bread Is not Sufficient" Matthew 4: 1-4

Satan tempted Jesus saying, "Change these stones to bread." Jesus replied, "One does not live by bread alone." What should we make of this episode?

The ordinary people in Jesus' time consumed daily a few pieces of unleavened bread, some figs, dried fish, and low-grade grape wine. They were hungry all the time. They must have wished many a time to change stones to bread.

Jesus, too, was familiar with hunger. He had four younger brothers and at least two younger sisters. In all probability his father Joseph had been dead for many years, because his name does not come up at all in Jesus' adult life.

As a young man, Jesus was the sole bread earner in the household of seven. Jesus must have wished many a time to change stones to bread.

Satan was saying to Jesus, "Think only for yourself and your family. You cannot worry about other people. They are not your problem.

Jesus refused to think this way. His thinking may be summarized like this. If you seek food only for yourself with no thoughts for others, it explodes in your hand; it becomes a cause of egocentrism, injustice and oppression.

On the other hand, food becomes a medium of God's grace when it is shared with others. God's intention is clear: everybody should be fed; no one is to be left out. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Here it is good to be reminded that Jesus invited to his table the sick, the destitute, the mentally challenged, and all the despised people of the land. With no exception, they were desperately hungry.

With Jesus as the host, they shared food with one another, and in doing so, they contributed to each other's well being. Jesus transformed food to be a medium of love.

Food by itself does not make human life truly human. It is the sharing of it that makes human life truly human.

Leo Tolstoy is a Great Russian novelist. He also wrote children's stories. One of them describes heaven and hell.

Hell is a dining room. In the middle of it, there is a table piled up with meat, fresh bread, and all kinds of vegetables. But the people in the dining room are emaciated. The long forks and knives are tied around their elbows so that they cannot bend their arms. They are desperately trying to eat the food in front of them but cannot. Frustrated and angry, they are shouting and cursing, but to no avail.

What does heaven look like? It, too, is a large dining room. The table is piled up high with all kinds of delectable things. Furthermore, long forks and knives are tied around the people's elbows so that they cannot bend their arms. And yet, they are healthy, well fed, and happy. Why? The answer is simple: they are feeding each other. They are giving food to each other.

Bread becomes a medium of love and grace when and only when it is shared with others. Jesus invites us Christians to be loving and gracious by sharing it with others.

That is not a burden even in a dire economic situation like ours today. Rather, it is joy. It is an honor. It is a privilege. It is what braces us for the living of these days.