

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 3rd 2014

In today's world, we eat fast food and we are often hungry. We snack on junk food and don't feel nourished. We fill ourselves with empty calories and wonder why we are tired or cranky or still hungry.

It's not just food. We are also hungry for spiritual nourishment. Our spirits are unhealthy because we are often distracted from doing what we know we need to do to nourish them. We're too busy to spend moments in prayer. We'll pay lip service to our spiritual diet, instead choosing off of a menu of selfishness. We don't share of ourselves.

The gospel of the loaves and the fishes reminds me of a recent project I was part of where a group of students, two other faculty members and I traveled to a remote, rural town in southwestern Alaska. There, many of the Native people still practice a subsistence lifestyle – getting much of their food for the whole year from fishing the rivers and hunting and gathering on the tundra. Even in this modern world, the people practice age-old customs of sharing the first fish caught or first moose hunted with the elders and others in the village. While our group was there, the generosity of the people was amazing. We stayed at a parish hall and people would drop off fish, vegetables, cookies and other goodies. They made caribou stew and moose soup to welcome and sustain us.

The people there value this subsistence food as it is food with a story, not just some packaged product thrown in a grocery cart. Families work to set nets and catch fish that are dried and smoked to last through the long cold winter. They gather berries on the tundra that are dried or frozen. The food has a connection to their lives. They practice gratitude over every catch, every hunted animal, every meal. They share what they have with each other and with strangers.

That is the food that nourishes us. When we are present in the moment, when we share with our families and friends, when we are thankful for all of creation and all who made the meal possible. While I might have to get my salmon from the grocery store, I can still share and express gratitude for those who made the meal possible. I can be thankful for my family and friends who share the meal and listen to their stories. I can share myself with them. It is this connection to God and to the community that nourishes my body, heart and spirit.

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