

18th A

July 31, 2011

There are really two meals, two banquets in Matthew's Gospel. The first is a stag party thrown by King Herod for the leading men of Galilee. There is lots of food, plenty of alcohol, and there is one girl. Her name is Salome; she is Herod's stepdaughter. And she dances for the drunken King Herod, who promises her anything. At the urging of her mother, Salome asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Quite a dinner: food, booze, sex, and someone dies.

In the very next line, St. Matthew tells of Jesus, hosting a large gathering of ordinary people, outdoors in a deserted place. He teaches them for many hours, feeds perhaps 25,000 people with five loaves and two fish. The people are nourished, enlightened, and able to feed others. It's as if Matthew is saying, "These are two ways of living in the world, two sets of values. Which do you choose?"

There are also two kinds of hunger in the world. The hunger for fish or bread or rice or beans—or anything. The hunger that makes mothers walk 100 miles from Somalia into Kenya, some of them leaving their dead babies on the side of the desert road. The hunger for which our St. Vincent de Paul Society purchases a truck full of simple foods from the Free Store/Food Bank every month to distribute to families who live within our parish boundaries.

And there is a different kind of emptiness, too. Full stomachs but lonely, broken hearts. Overflowing refrigerators, but starving spirits. Wages spent for what fails to satisfy. A gain of weight among our young people—an obesity epidemic--but a loss of meaning.

Spiritual beings trying to fill God-sized longings with the visible.
Looking for happiness and satisfaction in the wrong places. Mother
Theresa often said to middle-class people: "Don't come to India!
There are plenty of hungry people where you live! They are hungry
for love!" [pause]

Mass is a dinner too, isn't it? Jesus gathers us, teaches us
through his Word and—we hope--in the homily. Jesus feeds us with
food from heaven, then sends us out to nourish others in whatever
way we can. Jesus has no hands but ours. We are his Body.

There are hungry people out there—some for food, others for
someone to care. Our gift in today's second offering will help the St
Vincent de Paul Society to feed hungry people right in our own
neighborhoods.

For the leaders of our country
that will be able to work together for the common good,
we pray to the Lord.