

Never Hunger, Never Thirst Mike Tenney - 2024-11-21

INTRODUCTION: We welcomed back Mike Tenney for the 16th time as he gave a talk on Eucharistic devotion. Mike began his talk by describing a typical morning in the Tenney household which can be simply summarized as insanely busy, frenetic, and filled with lots of “shoulds” and “gottas” and not enough time to get to the “wants.” And this typical busy day does even begin to address all the additional things that are part of our lives – the hardships, real challenges and pains of life – physical difficulties, mental/emotional difficulties, relationship difficulties, the challenge of hard people to love, and sometimes the challenge of being the hard one to love! No matter what our stage in life, we have a lot on our plates, and we have sin. This is what it means to be sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, to live in a broken world and feel called to more. In this broken world, even the good things can drag us down, seem like a burden or just an obligation. How do we handle a world that can be so hard, that asks and demands so much of us? This is the human condition we find ourselves in, and that every human has struggled with going all the way back to creation. Adam and Eve were in this beautiful garden, living literally in paradise, living in the image and likeness of God, experiencing no separation from God, and yet even there, they experienced temptation. We all experience voices in our head that can distract us, drag us down. How do we know which voices are true? People had these same questions for Jesus.

IDOLS IN OUR LIVES: During the feeding of the 5000, what the people thought was scarcity, Jesus turned into abundance. After the people followed Jesus across the sea, others joined them because they wanted to see the miracle too. The people asked Jesus “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness...” (John 6:30). The people got scared when Jesus left them, as the people got scared when Moses left them, and they created a golden calf to worship in his absence. We can be tempted to do the same things the Israelites did in the desert. We create our own idols, our own golden calves, they just look very different. For each of us, there is something in our lives that tempts us to worship it – the idol tells us that if we give it all that we have, then we are going to be happy, then we are going to be satisfied. The idol may be the desire to look a certain way, to be kinder, to be funnier, to be financially secure, to have a harmonious family, to be healthy. All these desires can become idols for us, when we think having them can bring us peace. This is the same temptation that Adam and Eve experienced in the garden, that the Israelites experienced in the desert, that the people following Jesus along the sea faced – it is tempting to make things that are not God into God, it is tempting to find things of this world, even things that are fundamentally good things, and turn them into idols. Mike shared with us a little examination of conscience someone gave to him to help figure out what are our idols: “When _____ is going well, our lives are going well.” Whatever fills the blank might just be our idol. We can also think of it negatively: “When _____ is not going well, our lives are not going well. What have we put before God, what have we placed our hope, our dreams in? What have we connected up our peace, our satisfaction, our contentment, our joy to and said, “THIS is going to give me what I want?”

BARGAINING WITH GOD: This system of idolatry was a type of bargaining system. The gods of the ancient world were not good, loving gods. They lived in a soap opera world in the sky, filled with petty jealousies, fighting, and capriciousness. Zeus was far from a good father. The way mere humans would get the attention of the gods was to make a sacrifice to them, they would make a bargain with a particular god – sacrifice to the harvest god for a good harvest, a rain god for rain, a fertility goddess for a healthy pregnancy. It was a bartering and bargaining system with gods that were not loving and did not particularly care about humans. Obviously, WE would NEVER attempt to make deals and bargains with God – if we just pray this novena, pray this rosary every day... There is nothing bad about these activities, but are we going to God trying to bargain with Him, are we going to God as if He is some far away god who is not a good loving father, who is not thinking about us, holding our existence together every moment? Do we think of Him as some far away Zeus who we have to plead with for attention? The God that we believe in as Christians is not the sort of God we need to bargain and plead with for attention. Our God sacrifices for us. God sacrifices His Child for us, not the other way around, when in the ancient world, some people would even sacrifice their children to the gods. God sacrifices Himself for us, and the only sacrifice He asks of us is the sacrifice of our hearts, the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of bringing ourselves to Him.

GOD IN THE EUCHARIST: Our God does not stay high and detached, to be adored from afar. Rather, Our God comes so close to us – “O come, o come Emanuel,” God with us. The main way He comes to be with us is in the gift of the Eucharist. Jesus says to the people in response to the request for a sign, “I will give you bread from Heaven, and you will eat it and you will never hunger and you will never thirst again” (paraphrased from John 6:35). The literal word Eucharist means “to give thanks” and how wonderful that we as a country celebrate a day of Thanksgiving to God for all the abundance of blessings He has given us. This secular holiday fits in well with Catholic teaching! The Eucharist is a different sort of sacrifice. Thomas Aquinas says it is the Sacrament of Love, the consummation of the whole spiritual life, it is God saying He is with us, telling us He wants to feed us with His very Self, He wants to come into

communion with us, He wants to become one with us. We literally put God into our mouths and digest Him and then He becomes part of us. We are what we eat! This is what Jesus means when He says "If you eat this bread, you will never hunger, you will never thirst again." He is speaking of spiritual hunger and thirst, though there have been some saints through the years who have subsisted on the Eucharist alone.

THANKSGIVING: In a spiritual way, we can have this "Never hunger, never thirst" experience. The word Eucharist, the word thanksgiving is key to this. Often, we have these great wants and desires and needs, and feel like we are barely scraping by because we have failed to give thanks for what we have. When we thank God, it resets our priorities. The Lord's prayer starts with praising God and thanking Him. Our praise determines our priorities. Any moment we want, we can find communion with God through thanksgiving – sometimes it looks like going to daily Mass, sometimes it looks like going to Sunday Mass, going to Adoration, praying a prayer of spiritual communion, or simply taking a moment to thank God and resetting our priorities. Nothing will give us peace like this communion of thanksgiving with God. Our peace, our satisfaction, our purpose all come from the Lord. There is a great gift in spiritual communion, in taking time to thank God, it is like a mini-Eucharist. The Sunday Eucharist is meant to sustain us throughout the week, but the more we can enter the spirit of praise and thanksgiving and communion on a daily basis, the more we can feel Jesus' promise of never hungering or thirsting again. It is similar to the woman at the well – Jesus offers her living water and she will never thirst again. Anytime we are thirsty, anytime we are hungry, if we can remember the God of the universe is here with us, and we thank Him for all that He has given us, all of a sudden, the things we worry about do not seem so big or important. If we get this right, everything else changes, if we get this wrong, then life is a heavy burden that weighs us down. If we get this right, we never hunger, we never thirst. If we get this wrong, we are starving, we are parched, we are in the desert.

FOUR PATHS/LEVELS OF EUCHARISTIC DEVOTION: Mike introduced us to four levels of Eucharistic devotion, some of which many of us are already doing. These levels do not necessarily have to go in order, and one can jump from one to another, though the first is clearly the first.

- **LEVEL 1 - OBLIGATION:** Our Sundays and Holy Days are days of obligation, where we as Catholics must attend Mass. However, the word "obligation" can have a bad reputation – it is something we have to do, but it is a good thing, and sets the bar at the bare minimum. It is a reminder that at least once a week, we need to be receiving the scriptures, gathering with others like us, hearing wisdom from the priest, receiving the Eucharist. Mike referred to it as a sweet obligation, something we can do in a spirit of thanksgiving, praise, and love.
- **LEVEL 2 – PERSONAL DEVOTION:** There is more we can do within the Mass proper, like read along with the readings, or even read them ahead of time, stay more focused during the Mass, pay careful attention to the words of the beautiful prayers the church has prayed for thousands of years, sing even if we do not have a great voice. Level two is a personal devotion, an entering into the Mass, more than just going as an obligation. This devotion can extend outside of Mass; in prayer, the rosary, Adoration. All of these help us to remember that things are not our god, God is our God.
- **LEVEL 3 – EUCHARISTIC FAMILY:** The Eucharist is a sacrifice, but it is also a meal. The church is a community, and is more than just some place we attend on Sundays. TASTE is a perfect example of a level three activity as we come together in community and fellowship every week. We do not just want to COME to church, we want to BE the church. We need to get involved with our parishes, and connect with the people of our parishes.
- **LEVEL 4 – MISSION:** The word "Mass" comes from the words at the end of every Latin Mass: "Ite missa est" meaning "Go, you are sent." We are being sent out into the world. At the Mass, we are transformed, and made into something new. We are fed with the bread of Jesus' body and blood, and we become the bread to go out and feed the world. This is the mission, the radical love of Christ. Jesus was often preaching about feeding the poor, helping those no one else was helping. Level four is a challenge for many of us. How can we be sacrificial in the mission? How can we take the church to those who are not walking in the doors, how can we radically love?

CONCLUSION: We need communion with Christ, otherwise we are going to be chasing after all these other good things that will not satisfy us. We are going to put our worth and our satisfaction in idols, but the world also invests in our communion with Christ because if we are not communing with Christ and if Christ is not transforming us, then we are not going to be able to help the world. First, we take the message of Jesus, the message of the Eucharist and thanksgiving, the message of this loving God who comes close to us, who is with us and unite with Him as best we can. Then we carry the message out in a radical way to the world. We need Jesus. The world needs Jesus, even if it does not know it.