

Our Sunday Visitor's

# THE Priest



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*Have We Done Enough?*

# Preaching About Hunger

By Richard Hart, O.F.M. Cap.

Preaching about hunger can be a daunting task. We have to remember that we are not giving a lecture but a homily. When the Scriptures present us with the opportunity, such as the Sundays devoted to the sixth chapter of St. John or other passages, we need to preach on this pressing issue.

It is challenging to focus on the people as well as some statistics: homeless, hungry, jobless, runaway teenagers, children of minimum-wage parents. We might even suggest a follow-up discussion group as a means of acquainting parishioners more with this important topic.

Hunger is more than a charity issue. It is a matter of justice. When Jesus fed the 4,000 in the desert who had been without food for three days, was this event just a miracle of multiplying the fish and the loaves? (Mk 8:1-9). Or was it an invitation to all of us to feed the

hungry?

Gandhi once said that God can come to us only as bread. Even as we are fed at the table of the Lord, we are then sent forth to feed others.

It is easy to give our assembly a snapshot of the huge problem of hunger, but it has to be done in a challenging way. Many of them are unaware that 12.5 percent of the United States population lives below the poverty line which amounts to 36 million according to the United States Census Bureau. Of these, 27 million children are being reared in low-income families, many of whom have no health insurance.

Over 800 million go hungry every day of their lives.<sup>1</sup> Every five seconds a child dies. One pastor got this message across by having his assembly snap their fingers at five-second intervals and telling them that each time they did this a child dies. What a powerful way to drive home a point.

President Bush recently signed a bill to have a 2-billion-dollar fence built along our border with Mexico. We are fencing out people instead of feeding empty stomachs — especially children. The Governor of New Mexico, Bill Richardson, stated that we might be able to build a fence 70 feet high, but the immigrants will build a ladder more than 70 feet high to scale the fence. How much food could 2 billion dollars buy, especially for children?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer maintained that the morality of any society will be determined by what it does for its children. Or consider how much of the money spent on the Iraq War could be used to feed hungry people.

## **Hunger and the Homeless**

The connection between the homeless and hunger is rather obvious, but often ignored.

The Bloomberg Administration in

## **IN BRIEF**

- **Hunger and the homeless**
- **Poverty and hunger**
- **Poor are marginalized**
- **Lack of attention**
- **Familiarity the devil's trump card**
- **Reaching out**
- **Deeper hunger**



New York City announced in 2004 that the homeless would not receive any priority to housing apartments. The homeless in New York City have increased by 11 percent, some 8,700 families in the fall of 2006, according to the report of the Coalition for the Homeless. In the same year the homeless were not allowed to apply for Federal housing vouchers.

Census figures for Allenton, Pa., show about 23 percent of its population living in poverty. The gap between the haves and the have-nots is growing there and elsewhere in our country. Students there are often too hungry to focus on learning.<sup>2</sup> Pearl Bailey maintains that "Hungry people cannot be good at learning or producing anything except perhaps violence."

An estimated two million are homeless here in the United States, and the greater scandal is how so many of us accept their plight. Many of them are Veterans who served in the Vietnam War. Now it is illegal to feed the homeless in Las Vegas. Our concern should increase when we consider the 200 million homeless children in the world.

Father John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., points out in an article, "Labor's Love Lost," that the average CEO make 475 times as much as an average worker. We are protecting our executives as they cut the wages and benefits of their employees. Yet Congress can pass legislation to increase their own salaries and give tax breaks to the 14,000 wealthiest people in the country.<sup>3</sup>

African countries do not have anyone to lobby for food programs in Washington, D.C., because of a lack of money. How often do we hear political candidates running for office talk about hunger, poverty and homelessness? We need to encourage our Congress to address this issue, and persist in asking like the widow who kept pestering the judge who finally granted her justice (Lk 18:1-8).

### Poverty and Hunger

Poverty is one of the biggest contributors to hunger and leads to limited access to water, poor sanitation and air quality, inadequate housing, and edu-

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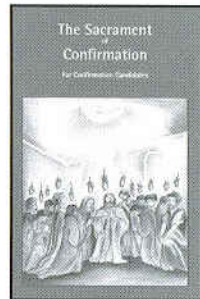
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## **Jesus made it very clear that we are to feed the hungry, but the devil then plays his trump card of familiarity.**

cation. People with a decent income are not hungry. It is reported in Bangladesh that millions of people have no other choice than to drink poisonous water and breathe poor quality air. Children there should be wearing masks.

It is hard for us to imagine or grasp how Nigerians live on a dollar a day, and sometimes less. Some hungry people spend all of their waking hours searching for food. Eight million die every year because they are too sick to survive. Those who want to work are unable to because they are poorly nourished.

A vicious cycle takes its toll on them. They are often powerless, and many suffer from social and economic discrimination. How fair is it for the extremely poor not to have a chance to reach self-actualization?

### **Grow Out of Poverty**

Thomas L. Friedman, a columnist for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, maintains "that people grow out of poverty when they create small businesses that employ their neighbors. Nothing else lasts."<sup>4</sup>

Reynaldo Roledo, a former migrant worker, came from Mexico 39 years ago. He made only \$12 a day, but that was 10 times as much as he made in his own village in Mexico. He believed in himself and through hard work widened his horizons. He became the first migrant worker in the United States to found his own winery in Sonoma, Calif. The winery has won many gold medals at international competitions for its fine wines.

Dr. Donovan Russell, who has spent 25 years working with the poor and hungry in various countries, witnessed street women so desperate that they inflicted burns on their children thinking that people would feel sorry for them and give them food. Tonight millions of children will go to bed hungry because of poverty, drought or disease.

The tragedy of hunger has become a parent's worst nightmare. If malnutrition does not kill, it can cause blindness, deformities and brain damage.

The journey to poverty is downward, so we use the expressions, "hitting the bottom, down on our luck, bottoming out." It is a plunge into a cold chasm.

The poor are definitely marginalized and must be heard. Are we listening to the cry of the poor across racial boundaries? It is estimated that 35 million people in the United States are still without adequate income. The majority of people who become poor do so because of a loss of a job or a family breakup. So the war on poverty needs to be fought on two fronts: regain employment and family stability.

According to Walter Bruggemann, an Old Testament scholar, God is preoccupied with the poor. Pope Benedict XVI recently called for a debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries. Jeffrey Sachs in his book *The End of Poverty* advocates that we can end poverty by: boosting agriculture, improving basic health care, investing in education, giving people electrical power, providing clean water and sanitation.

Yet our culture is increasingly materialistic and consumerist. Some drive a BMW, an Audi or a Hummer instead of a Corolla, or buy a five-bedroom house instead of a two-bedroom. John Edwards pays hundreds of dollars for a haircut. The American lifestyle cries out for more and more, rather than for less and less.

### **Lack of Attention**

Many of the privileges we enjoy are derived from exploiting other societies. A ripple effect results when we in the First World get what we want, but people in the Third World don't get what they need. We are often too busy earning more money and shopping for more articles. We become entrapped in the spider web of consumerism. Wordsworth's sonnet is so true, "The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

When we see children's distended bellies or emaciated bodies on television, we can easily become immune and

focus our attention on "more important matters." We would rather debate some other issue like the soaring price of gas. One pastor in Zambia had a man drop dead a few yards from his living quarters. The pathologist who examined him said he died of hunger, and that his shrunken stomach contained a few leaves and a ball of grass. The pastor said that on that day a controversy had arisen about a possible merger of churches.

Hunger and malnutrition are deadly, and we need to rivet our attention on them before their grip tightens on the world. We tolerate or become comatose to millions of people starving to death. Under what deadly sin would we categorize this tragedy? Most would say greed. What about sloth?

### **Familiarity with the Problem**

Familiarity can become a stumbling block in addressing this problem. Recall how the hometown people of Jesus' time were not too excited about Him because they failed to realize who He really was. He was no different than anyone else. St. Mark tells us what they said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (6:3-4) Mark adds that Jesus did not perform any deeds there because of their unbelief.

Familiarity has a way of hiding us from harsh realities like famine, poverty, destitution, malnutrition. Jesus made it very clear that we are to feed the hungry, but the devil then plays his trump card of familiarity. A strong inclination exists to inaction and even smugness at times.

Bob Dole was asked what he feared most about our efforts to feed the hungry. His response was one word, "apathy." The real difference between the hungry, the poor, and ourselves is their

frequent inability to change, whereas we can change things. Virtue and desire alone never feeds the hungry and the poor. St. James admonishes us, "Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (1:22).

### Reaching Out

We have to become the hands and feet of Jesus reaching out to the hungry, the poor, the homeless. All parishes, not just a few, must link arms with the government and non-governmental organizations like Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions clubs and others, to reverse the trend of hunger. Our goal has to be a hunger-free world, which is not a utopian dream.

Experts point out that enough food is produced annually to feed every person on the planet. Some parishes focus on minor issues rather than the broader mission of hunger and poverty. The Church has to be the incubator in resolving this pressing problem by educating others how to counteract hunger.

Maybe our love is too shallow or limited, and we fall into the trap of letting someone else reach out to the hungry. Limited love is often self-serving as Jesus pointed out when he said, "If you love those who love you. What reward do you have? Do not tax collectors do the same?" (Mt 5:46). Unlimited love does not exclude anyone.

Loving one's neighbor does not mean we have to become a doormat, allowing people to walk all over us. It implies returning evil with good, violence with non-violence, which can be very challenging. St. Paul encourages us, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads" (Rom 12:20).

We side more with what divides us rather than what unites us: we and they, rather than we. We all belong to each other on this planet because that is the way God made us. Christ showed His unlimited love by dying to keep us this way.

We need a win-win strategy which will save our nation and planet. Our

views or vision might also have become frozen in hopelessness. We need to defrost them with warming and widening hearts that show unlimited love. We are caught up in the paralysis of analysis instead of action.

George McGovern asks how can we sit in a fancy restaurant and pay \$25 for a meal when we know that there are starving and hungry people right outside on the streets? We could spend less money for a meal and give the rest to



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fighting hunger. W. Somerset Maugham wrote that "People often feed the hungry so that nothing may disturb their own enjoyment of a good meal."

We need to ask our parishioners what they are doing to alleviate the problem of hunger? Are any of their actions contributing to the problem? A Battle Against Hunger is a campaign sponsored by St. Matthew's Episcopal church in Pennystone, N.J. They raised \$55,000 through bike-tour efforts. World Hunger Campaign solicits donations and assures contributors that 28 cents will provide a nutritious meal for a child. One Campaign has close to 100,000 members who have joined together to fight against poverty.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. We can also say that the uncommitted life is not worth living. Jesus told Peter and us, "Feed my sheep," the flocks who are hungry. William Sloane Coffin maintained that no smaller packages exist than those wrapped up in themselves. He asked concerning hunger, "Why haven't we done more already?" A good question.

George McGovern maintains that we cannot be a good Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist by ignoring hunger. Pedro Sanchez, co-chair of the United Nations Taskforce on Hunger, is convinced that we can turn the tide in working to cut hunger in half by 2015. Pope John Paul II, in an address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, called for a vast mobilization of public opinion to end world hunger.

### Deeper Hunger

Pope Benedict XVI refers to the tragedy of hunger as a "scourge." He maintains that the suffering of innocent hungry children is a severe test of the faith of many Catholics. Food for the Poor, an international non-profit Christian organization founded by Ferdinand Mahfood, began shipping supplies to the poor in 1982, and has shipped \$433 million in food, medicine and other supplies.<sup>5</sup>

The hunger that also needs to be alleviated is a spiritual hunger. We need to encourage our parishioners to

demonstrate a deeper respect, recognition, belonging, affirmation, reconciliation and approval of every person that they come in contact with, especially the hungry, the homeless and the poor.

A number of researchers have pointed out that Americans are less happy and contented with their lives despite the fact that their homes are bigger, the American economy is expanding, and there are more gadgets to help us and to play with.

David Myers, a social psychologist, maintains that we are caught up in a deep spiritual poverty because of rampant materialism and individualism. What we need is a deeper sense of belonging that arises from wholesome friendships, face-to-face conversations, and shared activities rather than a mall culture, spending much time watching television, or playing games on the computer. Our hunger for beauty, justice and community is a longing for God and God's kingdom. An inner emptiness can be filled only by God.

We need not preach a fire-and-brimstone homily, but certainly a passionate, spiritual one to move our parishioners to action. Are we on autopilot because much more could be done to address the problem of hunger? Don Imus made many offensive remarks before his remark about the Rutgers University women's basketball team. But public tolerance snapped at that one. What will it take to counteract the hunger present here in the United States and especially elsewhere?

We can make the world a better place. Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish in the desert, and we can encourage our people to be a part of this miracle. In our hunger, we need to feed the hungry. Then maybe the words of Jesus will be fulfilled, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35).

Even a spoonful at a time or one meal will help alleviate the problem. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta claimed that she could feed only one person at a time.

Jesus continues to say to us, "I was  
(Continued on page 48)

## The Crucifixion Eclipse

An exegetical article by Chick Pallotta Was this total eclipse of the sun in Luke 23:44 prophesied and in accord with the laws of science? Was it coincidental? Read what Pontius Pilate and Tertullian have said about it. It may surprise you!

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181.

<sup>18</sup> Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 183-191.

<sup>20</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook: For the Members of the People's Eucharistic League* (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 160-164.

<sup>21</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 183-191.

<sup>22</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 166.

<sup>23</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 183-191.

<sup>25</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 191.

<sup>26</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, Clara Morris Rumball, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1940), 58.

<sup>27</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *The Eucharist and Christian Perfection*, Part I, Mrs. Amy Allen, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 274.

<sup>31</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *The Eucharist and Christian Perfection*, Part II, Mrs. Amy Allen, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 208.

<sup>32</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard, *The Eucharist and Christian Perfection*, Part II, 208-209.

<sup>33</sup> For this month of meditations, see St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament* (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1930).

<sup>34</sup> Dempsey, 225-231.

<sup>35</sup> For this month of meditations, see St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Month of St. Joseph* (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948).

<sup>36</sup> Dempsey, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Father Eymard as quoted by Dempsey, 261.

<sup>38</sup> Roy, "Eymard, Pierre, Julian, St."

<sup>39</sup> Dempsey, 280.

<sup>40</sup> From the *Life and Letters of St Peter Julian Eymard, 2171* as quoted in "Eymard. . . In His Own Words," *Emmanuel* 106:10 (December, 2000), 621. **P**

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#### SPIRITUALITY (from page 32)

of the loss of an awareness of Christ as Savior and Lord. This is a time for us to pick up our books, sit down and kneel down, and begin working on the restoration of a truly Christian world vision. If priests do not do this, then who will?

In the next issue I will make some other suggestions for restoring a truly Catholic devotion to Christ our Lord.

**P**

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#### DEACONS & PRIESTS (from page 33)

This is an area which needs considerable development as the diaconate continues to mature. Only in this way can we serve each other with sensitivity and understanding. Ultimately, such mutual assistance has a ripple effect in assisting us to serve the People of God more effectively and compassionately.

**P**

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#### MASS OFFERINGS (from page 37)

of homes were for the support of the pastor (cc. 462 and 463).

<sup>7</sup> *Roman Missal, General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, April 20, 2000, n. 365.

<sup>8</sup> This "orientative" response is found in *Notitiae* 5 (1969), p. 325, no. 4.

<sup>9</sup> M. Francis Mannion, "Stipends and Eucharistic Praxis," *Worship*, 57 (1983), pp. 211-212.

<sup>10</sup> John Huels, "Title III: The Most Holy Eucharist [cc. 897-958]," in *A New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 1130.

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#### HUNGER (from page 43)

hungry and you gave me food" (Mt 25:35). **P**

1. Charles E. Wheaton, "Blessed are Those Who Hunger," *Living Pulpit* (Vol. 16, No. 1, 2007) 10.

2. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., and Katharyn L. Waldrin, "Jesus Feeding the Hungry: Miracle or Mandate?" *Living Pulpit* (Vol. 16, No. 1, 2007) 6.

3. John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., "Labor's Love Lost" (*America*, Vol. 195, No.5).

4. Thomas L. Friedman (*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, April 21, 2007) 15.

5. Ferdinand Mahfood has written *Are You Serious?* put out by Food for the Poor telling about his conversion and how important it is to take God seriously.

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**FATHER HART, O.F.M. Cap., is the director of preaching for the St. Joseph Province of the Capuchins. He has written articles for Pastoral Life, Human development, and Teacher's Journal.**

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#### BOOK (from page 49)

come alive, to give it emotion, to demonstrate how it is strewn with love and birth, hate and death. A chart near the beginning of the book presents family trees with chapter titles listed beside them to help the reader locate the key characters in each chapter. Also provided are maps of Ireland and a detailed map of Dublin.

Particularly well covered are the Protestant-Catholic tensions, battles, and uprisings; the potato famine and its deadly results; and the desire of families to reclaim their ancestral lands against all opposition.

Through such characters as Brian O'Bryne, Walter Smith, Martin Walsh, and Jeremiah Tidy the struggles and heartache of Ireland are brought to life as their fates rise and fall in successive generations. **P**