

EPIPHANY: A TIME TO CELEBRATE GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 3, 2008

Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Hungry? Thirsty?

Ashamedly I admit that I've never been an avid water drinker, so I certainly didn't get drawn into the bottled water craze. But, every now and then, I do get thirsty and find that only water quenches my thirst.

In this week's Gospel lesson, Jesus commends those people who have a true hunger and thirst for the Word of God. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6, *NRSV*).

Our modern-day society paints many images of things that it assures us will assuage our hunger and thirst...from low-sugared vitamin-added concoctions to sleek Madison Avenue inspired ads that tout success and status via expensive cars, clothes, and jewelry. But what, however, is this "righteousness" that God approves of? The *Contemporary English Version* renders the verse in this way: "God blesses those people who want to obey him more than to eat or drink. They will be given what they want!"

So then, righteousness is a response to God's Good News—a response that accepts and acknowledges God's lordship, seeks to worship him, and commits to being obedient to his commands. Religiosity does not make the cut. Nor does mere knowledge of religious rites and rituals put us in right standing with God. It is not the erudite that will be blessed, but rather the man or woman who applies such learning to embrace the kingdom of God.

In fact, the apostle Paul puts it this way, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ... For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:20, 25, *NRSV*). Time and time again, God tells the people of Israel that he wants them to seek after him, that he loathes outward empty displays of worship because "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22b, *NRSV*).

As we live in community, we need to treat others justly and with mercy (Micah 6:8), but even more so, we need to actively yield ourselves in obedience to God's laws. When we truly hunger and thirst after righteousness, we'll find that God gives us a staple diet—that of a revelation of his Word. We'll find, too, unexpected blessings that refresh us far more than the bland fare the world feeds us. And, our hunger and thirst for God becomes a gift that leads to godly wisdom.

This New Year is a good time to examine our spiritual diet. Are we subsisting meagerly on tidbits from the Word of God? Or are we relishing God's Word so much that we're now up for a super-size portion? God promises us that if we "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33a, *NRSV*), he will provide all the things we need.

Still hungry? Still thirsty? Feast on God's Word.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Ecuador – With thanks for God's blessings and with prayers for the continuing provision of Bibles for the people of Ecuador and that the Lord will continue encouraging and strengthening the preaching of the Gospel to those who have not yet experienced an encounter with Jesus Christ as their personal Savior; **Colombia** – With thanks to God for the newly-dramatized New Testament in *Contemporary Language*, for the work of *Lectio Divina* among youth Catholics, and for Scripture distribution in prisons and hospitals, and with prayers for work among indigenous peoples, for an end to the violence and for those displaced by it; **Venezuela** – With thanks to God for increased Scripture distribution and for *Lectio Divina*, which has encouraged more young Catholics to read Scripture, and with prayers for the growth of *Pan de Vida*, for the Piaroa translation project, for the acquisition of a Bible House, and for wisdom for the staff and board.

Activity Corner: "Blessing" Box

Supplies needed: Bible; shoe Box (or any medium-sized gift box), wrapping paper, 3 x 5 index cards, pens or pencils.

Wrap a shoe box in wrapping paper (wrap bottom and top separately) and affix an index card on top on which is written BLESSINGS. Ask family members to write each of the nine beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) on 3 x 5 index cards. According to these beatitudes, who is being blessed and why? On the back of each card, write a short prayer based on the beatitude. Place the cards in the box and each day during the week, during family devotional time, select one of the beatitudes and prayers to be read. Conclude by asking family members to respond together, "WE WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD."

