

20th Sunday of Ordinary Time
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

Some of you have heard the story of my birth. You've heard me say that my parents were married in March 1962, and then quickly discovered that their first child was on his way.

I was due to be born on Jan. 1, 1963. But I was 3 weeks late, and finally arrived on January 21.

And some of you have heard – when I was born, I weighed 10 pounds, 6 ounces!

That's what you've heard me say. All of it is true.

But I don't think you've heard me say that, in my first year of life, I was well aware of the fact that I was hungry. So I ate... and ate. By the time of my first birthday, I weighed... 31 pounds!

But then, something happened. Apparently, I forgot that I was hungry. Or I lost touch with that fact. I don't know – I can't remember any of this!

My mother tried her best to get me to eat. But I wasn't hungry. So, by the time I turned two years old, I weighed 32 pounds.

My mother started to panic, so she took me to see Doctor Anthony. Doctor Anthony was an old-school family doctor.

Dr. Anthony did not believe in writing lots of prescriptions or running 33 tests – apparently this was before TV lawyers who sue doctors for everything!

So, Doctor Anthony looked at my eyes, looked in my ears, felt my knees. Then he declared: "There is nothing wrong with him."

My mother protested: "But he won't eat, and he has hardly gained any weight in a year!"

And Doctor Anthony said, "When he gets hungry, he'll know to start eating again."

When he gets hungry, he'll know to start eating again.

A few weeks later, I rediscovered the fact that I was hungry. So I started eating again. And I know that some of you are looking at me right now and saying, "Yeah, you started eating again, and you haven't stopped!"

That's the kind of story that my parents repeated around the table at Thanksgiving and

Christmas. A story that becomes a legend in the life of a family. And I think this story has lasted in our family because things like hunger and thirst are so basic to human existence, aren't they? As one author said, "Lots of people live without love or hope, but no one can live without food or water."

Hunger is about survival. Thirst is about living. Many of us do not have to worry about where our next meal is coming from. But many of our neighbors do. Still, there are times in our lives when we are acutely aware of how hungry we are, and how thirsty. It's about living, flourishing.

And while our most basic hungers are for the food that keeps us alive, isn't it true that there are times in our lives when we become aware of the fact that we are hungry for other kinds of things ... deeply yearning for something to help us flourish... hungry for the things which fulfill our lives?

For instance:

+ isn't it true that, right now, many of us are hungering for a political culture of which we can actually be proud? Many of us, I think, are hungry for a time when the politics of personal attack gives way to leadership which solves common problems. I'm hungry for that!

+ isn't it true that, right now, many of us are hungering for a world in which members of one faith do not have to fear that members of another faith will attack them, simply because of their creed? I'm hungry for that.

+ isn't it true that, right now, many of us are hungering for a world in which people do not have to flee their homelands in order to find security, freedom or opportunity? That's the kind of world in which no one is forced to become a refugee, and no one faces hostility or a lack of welcome wherever they go.

+ isn't it true that, in the Richmond area, some parents are uncertain about how they will clothe and feed their children in the coming school year.

+ and, isn't it true, that many Catholics – in fact, people of good will everywhere – are hungering for authentic and effective leadership in the Roman Catholic Church? A leadership which is both honest and accountable. A leadership which *lives* the Gospel as much as it *preaches* the Gospel. A leadership which takes full responsibility for past mistakes and crimes, a leadership which draws on the talents and insights of lay people to fix the problems of the present, a leadership willing to envision a new way of being church in the future. So that all of God's people, especially God's children, never have to face abuse again. I'm hungry for that!

+ Isn't it true that so many of us are hungry for a life that has meaning and purpose, we are hungry for a life with authentic relationships and deep-seated joy. I'm hungry for that.

Yes, there can be times when we are like a one year old boy. For a moment, we somehow forget that we are hungry for these authentic things. We can forget. We have a constant stream of gadgets, messages, social media and entertainment to distract us from what is real, either in our life or the lives of others.

But as Doctor Anthony said, eventually we will remember that we are hungry. Hungry for what matters. Hungering for what is real. And then we will eat.

But in that moment, the decisive question is: where do we turn when we are hungry? Where do we turn for sustenance and nourishment? Where do we turn?

So much of our culture tells us that our fulfilment is to be found in all the things that cannot satisfy us: entertainment, the next tweet, the newest game to be played on the ‘smart’ phones that are making us dumb. We are told that our hungers will be satisfied by the next purchase, the next promotion, the next illicit relationship, the next web page, the next drink. You know how that works. Actually, you know how this *doesn't* work.

We can *try* to fulfill our yearning with all of those things – but we discover that they are a smorgasbord of emptiness.

So we are aware that we are hungry. We are ready to eat. And along comes Jesus, who says:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.

We know we are hungry, and along comes Jesus, who says:

Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

We know we are hungry. We're ready to eat what brings authentic nourishment. And along comes Jesus, who says:

My flesh is true food. My blood true drink. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.

For a while, we can forget that we are hungry. But Dr. Anthony is right. Eventually, we all rediscover the fact that we are hungering and thirsting, not for something, but for someone. And his name is Jesus. And he is the bread of life.

Saturday night - [Tonight, we are privileged to share in a special moment in the lives of several of our brothers and sisters. They were baptized as Catholics, but have not yet celebrated the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. But as the journey of their life has continued, they have come to realize that they are hungry – hungry for what Jesus offers, hungry for the bread of life. Tonight we will pray for them as they are sealed with the Holy Spirit and receive the Eucharist for the first time. And as they are nourished by the body and blood of Christ, we are reminded of what a privilege it is for us to gather for the Eucharist each week.]

Sunday morning- [This morning, we baptize young children into the life of Christ. I am not sure if any of them weighed ten pounds when they were born! But I am sure of one thing – over time, as these children grow, they will realize that they are hungry... hungry for what Jesus offers, hungry for the bread of life. Today we pray for them as they are baptized into eternal life through Christ. And as we witness their immersion into the journey of faith, we are reminded of what a privilege it is for us to be baptized believers, believers who have the privilege of gathering for the Eucharist each week.]

Are you hungry? Jesus will nourish you. He nourishes you with his life-giving word that is found in the scriptures. Are you hungry? Jesus will nourish you with his life-giving spirit in all of the sacrament. Are you hungry? Jesus will nourish you through the people sitting next to you, through the people who will inspire you, through the people you will meet as you serve others in Jesus' name.

Are you hungry? Good! Because here, at this table, we encounter the One we're hungry for. Here we encounter Jesus Christ, the bread of life, the word made flesh, the son of God, the source of eternal life. No smorgasbord of emptiness here – simply the bread and wine which lead to a life that does not end.

Now.... I'm hungry!

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