

Downward Ascent 4: Ruining Our Appetites

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they shall be filled.' (Matt. 5:6)

Jesus wrecks our appetites. Sexy idols compete in vain with the One who offers Himself to us constantly; He becomes the meal, living bread and drink endowed with power to secure our deepest desires. I spoke with a young Hungarian man the other day who proudly declared his openness to many gods and lovers in contrast to the 'rigid' Catholic family he left behind. 'But don't you miss the One who abides with You through the Eucharist?' Caught off guard, he nodded slightly, as if remembering a hundred such meals.

Fast food beckons to us constantly. For this we are right to feel poverty and grief. Some of us feel tempted. How blessed we are to know not only the right ethic but also the proper end of all of our hungers: Jesus Himself. To the hungry He calls out constantly: 'The other gods cannot satisfy you; they commit not to your nourishment but to your destruction. Come to Me with your hungers: eat ME!'

Jesus has unique authority to become the ground of our righteousness. The Father 'made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2C 5:21) Marvel above all marvels: God has made the way for us to become righteous in the whole sense of the word. He assumes our poisons and becomes the antidote for our warped appetites.

We can unite with the Source as the renewed source of our desires. Founded in Him, seeking only Him as our righteousness, we begin the awesome, arduous task of aligning our emotions and affections to His will. We can say with the Psalmist: 'All my longings lie open before You; all my fountains [desires, longings] are sourced in You!' We dare not separate our sexual passions from His refining fire. God present to us in Eucharist, Spirit, Word and holy friendship gifts us with the freedom and restraint to love what He loves.

A good pastor friend recounted a conversation with a congregant who had recently embraced his homosexuality and new lover. 'Do you love Jesus more as a result?' Deceived but not a liar, the duped man could not answer 'yes.'

God-with-us becomes our righteousness. We hunger for Him before all others. That is why we fast. On one hand He is very near; on the other, far away and ours only in faith. So we choose to give up this or that in order to declare: 'You, only You, have won my heart.' Fasting rids us of many 'foods' that dull us—calories, booze, media, virtual distractions, benign 'fillers.' Before the One who is our righteousness, we dare to feel our emptiness. He takes us back to our beginning—Himself. We wait and long for and welcome the One who sustains our lives and who will guide us to a glorious end--Himself.

'Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire but You. My heart and my flesh may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.' (PS 73: 25, 26)

'Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you will go hungry.' (LK 6: 25)

Prayer for Thursday, March 20th: 'Father, we welcome the truth of our hunger and thirst. By Your grace, gather up and unite our desires with You the Source of every good thing. Show us what we can lay down in these days of Lent in order to feel the ache that only You can fill.'

Prayer for Friday, March 21st: 'Father, show us how Your Son is in truth our Bread. Sensitize us to the Word and Your abiding Spirit. Grant us patience to wait before You and apprehend Your whispers.'

Prayer for Saturday, March 22nd: 'Father, as we wait before You, call to mind and heart those ones we love who have yet to yield their hungers to You. Might You alert them to the vanity of life apart from living in faithful awareness of You? And in faithful obedience, might Your Spirit quicken us to love them more effectually?'

Prayer for Sunday, March 23rd: 'Father as we come to Your Table this day, help us to savor Your real Presence in the Eucharist. Enliven this most precious gift in us. Show us once more how You Jesus have reclaimed us as Your dwelling place. Thank You for offering Yourself afresh as our Source; thank You for becoming our righteousness.'