

August 2

Homily by Cathy Hartrich

On Monday I returned from LA, visiting my daughter's family and the LACW (LA Catholic Worker), of which she's been a part for the last 10 years. In reflecting on the scriptures today, which regard the abundance of God, I can't help but think of this abundance I witnessed inside the LACW.

3 days a week, in the heart of Downtown LA's Skid Row, the CW's "Hippy Kitchen" (as it's called) serves nutritious meals of lentils, beans, salad and bread to anyone (I mean anyone!) who wants a meal. There, people are graciously welcomed to eat and relax in the shaded garden alongside the kitchen. Up to 800 meals are distributed each day, with an army of volunteers preparing and serving them.

Skid Row is vast, covering about 50 blocks inside an industrial zone in Downtown LA. It's estimated that approximately 4,000 unhoused persons live there, half of whom sleep on the sidewalks, mostly in makeshift tents, vulnerable to the bi-weekly sweeps by the Street Department.

At first glance Skid Row appears to be a very sad, dirty and somewhat scary place with trash-strewn streets and masses of unhoused persons everywhere, seeming to wander without clear purpose or direction. Many of whom have forms of mental illness. But upon closer look, I've been surprised to find a *community* ... participating in the Family of God. There I could see a network of neighbors. Not to say that things are *always* smooth and peaceful. They're not. But many people on Skid Row have lifelong friendships and quality relationships... like us. Most know each other by name and banter with each other, some in English and many in Spanish.

Within the Hippy Kitchen, I've witnessed the volunteers sharing in the Abundance of God. The CW obviously helps to foster the larger community of unhoused persons, where they greet guests by first names. They fully stand on the promise of Isaiah:

"All you who are thirsty,
come to the water!
You who have no money,
come, receive and eat;
Come, without paying....

Why spend your money for what is not bread;
your wages for what fails to satisfy?
Listen to me, and you shall eat well,
you shall delight in rich fare.”

And today’s gospel, about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, drives home this message of the **abundance of God**, not just in the form of miracles, but in the form of **companionship**.

Imagine, on that late afternoon of the loaves and fishes near the Sea of Galilee, the “Anawim,” (the “poor ones”) coming from *all* different directions to encounter the Christ whom their hearts sought out. They followed him, wherever he went, not planning ahead with provisions of food for the long afternoon into the evening. After all, they followed him to get the Bread of Life in the form of his *words*, not seeking bread for their bodies. But after a while, their bodies were famished! It was those people, hungry for his words, and later, hungry for food, who inspired Jesus to nourish their bodies as well as their souls.

The Hippy Kitchen, too, nurtures souls as well as bodies. It bustles with the activity of the many hands of volunteers, chopping vegetables, buttering bread, washing dishes. There one encounters an unrelenting JOY and constant expressions of AFFECTION, both among volunteers and in those who come through the serving line seeking both literal bread and the **bread of companionship**. Coincidentally, PAN in the word companionship is Latin for *bread*, and COM means *with*... Literally translated, a companion is "one with whom you share bread." Companionship is the real MIRACLE! The real abundance of God!

This kind of bread, the bread of companionship, is shared in the CW’s adjoining garden of flowering plants and lush trees, filled with picnic tables. The garden is an oasis where those, who don’t have a comfortable place to sit on the sidewalk, can rest. In the garden, Guests can rest and nourish both their bodies and souls. As if they heard Jesus’ call: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Inside the garden and throughout the kitchen there are gorgeous murals adorning the walls. My favorite is by CW artist, Demitri Kadiev. It’s a mural of a last supper scene with Dorothy Day breaking a loaf of bread surrounded by the most diverse group of people you’ve ever seen. Truly a lovely, humbling portrayal of the bread of companionship. Breaking bread with those in need and being blessed by them in return. That’s the abundance of God.

Of course the LACW doesn't have the corner on this kind of companionship and abundance. Just this week I experienced it in the kitchen of the *St. Louis* CW, where Christine Jones, Bill Miller and I join Theo and Lindsey in weekly burrito-making. I *also* see God's abundance shared in *the Cronan's* community the first Saturday of the month (including yesterday) across the street, where Cronanites pack and deliver food to undocumented immigrant families. And on Friday I experienced God's abundance in the *Singing Resistance* gathering on the Downtown corner of Spruce and Tucker in front of ICE's Removal Operations field office. Every Friday morning there's a group of vigilers, who sing protest songs there to the lines of incoming traffic, in solidarity with ICE detainees and deportees.

I highly recommend, if you want to be blessed in this bread of companionship, that you too jump in and lend a hand. It can be small or big. If you need any ideas, ask around and don't be shy. There will always be invitations to get involved. Trish Curtis's newsletter, shared through CronanTalk, offers many ideas of activism possibilities. There's just so many! And I promise, in doing just one of them, you too will experience God's abundance... the food that satisfies...

And have a lot of fun as well.

In the meantime, as we participate in our weekly Eucharist, think of *our* companionship, those with whom we share **the Bread of Life**, both here at this table and with those in the world, who have little to eat and whose homes are insecure. May we say in our hearts, together with our celebrant, **"Take this, all of you, and eat of it: for this is my body which will be given up for you."**

May we, like Jesus, as companions on the journey, be broken and shared, so that our world might be made whole.