

TEXT: Lectionary readings  
THEME: The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth  
SUBJECT: The Spirit of truth  
TITLE: The Hungry Soul

Pentecost Sunday  
23 May 2021  
Messiah Moravian  
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Anyone who lives a truly conscious life will be unable to settle for being passively driven from work to leisure and from leisure back to work again; now and then one must pause and ask where one's life is going and where humanity and the world are heading. How long can we simply enjoy access to an ever wider selection of consumer goods without accepting our small share of responsibility for all this activity and its consequences?

We know the current epicurean style of the Good Life is a result of market research techniques developed to sell immediate gratification, and, as such, is a natural outgrowth of consumer capitalism. Drunk, sunbaked, stretched out in a beach chair, I am unable, says Philip Lapote, to ward off the sensation of being utterly alone, unconnected, cut off from others. Keep busy, I always say. At all costs avoid the trough of passivity, which leads to the Slough of Despond.

From time to time, the person who lives with some degree of self-awareness will wonder why the restlessness, whence the hope, which desires are worthy of my life, and what do my anxieties signal about my pursuits? Is our busyness, in part, a flight from awareness of a hunger, a dissatisfaction, a desire for . . . for what? We may not know.

In the background of the story of Pentecost is the story of the tower of Babel. It is a parable, really, of humanity's delusional obsession with limitless possibilities. It is an adolescent fantasy of independence, of believing we can by economic means, technological prowess and strategic planning satisfy the hunger of our souls, that we can in fact build a bridge from earth to heaven. The consequence of this egoism is an inability to communicate, a loss of communion, and the splintering of the human family.

The story of the tower of Babel, written millennia ago, is a modern story. We are divided by language, by ethnicity, by race, by nationality. Yet, we still believe in the promise of salvation through technology and the perfecting of the economic machinery of empire. Who is so ungrateful as to grouse about the benefits afforded by the modern age?

On the other hand, who is counting the costs? One could do worse than spend some leisure time watching Charlie Chaplin's movie "Modern Times." Aware of the costs, the awakened restrict expressions of gratitude to variations of the hunter's alertness. They give thanks for a nip in the air that clarifies the scent, but cannot pretend satisfaction while anyone is still hungry.

Is it only the sufficiently inebriated who still believe the gulf between earth and heaven is bridged by faith, love, and hope, realized in the practices of contemplation and compassion?

In the final stages of Dave's education in architecture, the university strongly recommended each student travel to Europe on a study program to see first hand the great monuments and cathedrals of Greece and Italy. After considerable scraping and saving, Dave put away enough money for the trip.

One way to save money involved the purchase of a "Eurail Youthpass," unlimited mileage on the trains of Europe for 60 days. Often, to avoid the cost of hotel or hostel accommodations, passage was booked overnight and Dave and his friend slept sitting up in the train.

One night in northern Italy, Dave awoke to find the train stopped. He couldn't make out anything outside the window and he began to get uneasy. Then he saw it. A flashing red light with an urgent message on the console at the edge of the compartment. He couldn't read enough Italian to understand the message, but the flashing red light coupled with the unexpected halt of the train could only mean one thing: the train was on fire.

Dave sprang to his feet elbowing his friend sitting next to him. "Get up! I think the train is on fire." Both tried to dance their ways into their backpacks, fumbling for the latch to the compartment door and spilled into the narrow passageway which ran the length of the car. A conductor walked nonchalantly down the passageway, whistling a little tune.

"Do you speak English?" Dave demanded. "Yes," the conductor said. Dave shouted, "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" The conductor seemed confused. Dave pointed to the wildly flashing red warning light in the compartment. "What does that say?" he barked. "Ah," the conductor answered, trying to conceal a smile. "It says, 'Please don't use the toilets while the train is stopped.'"

It is easy to misread the flashing red warning lights of our lives. Should I stay or should I go? Should I try harder or should I let go? When we become aware that all is not well, when we realize a desire for more than the spectacle of consumer capitalism, hope is born. Dissatisfaction and desire are the flashing red warning lights of our lives.

If we pay attention, we may be awakened to a hunger for . . . for what? Dissatisfaction and desire are languages hard to translate. At this point all the soul knows for certain is that it is hungry. The important thing, says Simone Weil, is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same.

The danger, continues Weil, is not lest the soul doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty.

Here is an open secret. It was declared for all the world to hear by Jesus himself, yet we pretend not to know it. Jesus said we were better off without him. Jesus knew he could not fully satisfy our hunger. There was so much more we needed than he had time to give, so much more needed than we had capacity to learn. Therefore, Jesus promised to send the Spirit of truth to lead us into all truth.

The time we live in doubts the reality of truth, doubts any bread exists to satisfy our hunger. Some are convinced they have no soul and act like it. Many believe the bridge from earth to heaven is constructed by the work of their own hands. Repressing or denying the hunger of their souls, they work, work, work to build a bridge to a retirement filled with leisure, a leisure they believe will, someday, deliver the promised fulfillment.

To persuade ourselves we are not hungry leads to depression, if not to a reckless trek through the valley of the shadow of death filled with fear. The Feast of Pentecost celebrates the Spirit of truth who will not let us pretend. The violent wind of the Spirit of truth intensifies our dissatisfactions, sets fire to our desires, until we can no longer deny our hunger.

May the Spirit of truth awaken you, fill you, interpret the warning signs for you, and lead you into the truth of your life!