

WORLD FOOD DAY October 16

The aim of World Food Day, proclaimed in 1979 by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (F.A.O.) of the United Nations, is to heighten public awareness of the world food problem and strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. The Day marks the anniversary of the founding of F.A.O. in 1945. The U.N. General Assembly endorsed in 1980 the observance of World Food Day in consideration of the fact that "food is a requisite for human survival and well-being, and a fundamental human necessity."

Call to Worship

During this autumn season, full of the bountiful harvests and plentiful food, people of faith understand that God calls all nations not only to thanksgiving for these gifts, but to repentance and a new commitment.

God calls us to repentance from a mind set that resists public responsibility for hunger in our midst and a new commitment to address the needs of hungry people in our land.

We know that hunger exists and that it is growing. We also know that hunger need not exist anywhere in today's world. And we know, beyond a shadow of any doubt, that the love of Christ calls us to do all we can to change the situation.

Opening Prayer

Therefore, let us take a few quiet moments to give thanks and to pray for our neighbors who will not eat enough this day, that they may be filled, and for our nation and those who shape its policies, that the elimination of hunger may truly become a national priority. And let us pray for ourselves that we may be filled with such love for those who hunger that we commit ourselves to unaccustomed actions that will send a strong, determined signal to world leaders to work for an end to hunger in our bountiful earth.

(Pause for silent reflection and prayer)

Reading from the Word of God (Mark 6:35-42)

Reading from St. Thomas of Villanova, O.S.A. ("The Poor Cry Out")

The destitution of the poor cries out against us, and their cries ascend to God. One abounds; another dies from hunger. Will God not examine these things? Have you seen a poor person perish from hunger? If you did not feed him, you have killed him! The voice of his blood cries out against you at judgment.

A stone from the wall shall cry out, says the prophet. He shared and gave to the poor, his justice remains forever. He does not say *his mercy*, but *his justice*, because to give in this way is a work of justice. Give money to the perishing that you might acquire justice that does not perish. You receive more from the poor than you give: you give a coin and receive heaven; you give a cloak and receive immortality; he is more merciful than you.

Oh! How great is the danger of riches! Observe the example of the rich banqueter: he was damned because he showed no mercy, not because he stole, but because he did not give. Nor should you wait for extreme necessity, when he is already holding a candle in his hand, for then he does not need your food, but a grave.

There needs to be lodging places for the poor in your cities, otherwise your homes must be their lodging. In winter, if a naked and sick person has no lodging, he is in danger. Whoever has room is bound to give him lodging, because he is in danger. If you do not do this, at least support hospices, make sure that they exist and promote them, so that you are not obliged to lodge the poor yourselves.

Commentary

We live and make purchases as though the economy had nothing to do with theology, while at the same time we speak of God - evangelize - as though theology had nothing to do with economics. St. Augustine did not permit himself that luxury and he asks that we question ourselves in this regard.

"God does not demand much of you. He asks back what he gave you, and from you take

what is enough for you. The superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor. When you possess superfluities, you possess what belongs to others.” (Exposition on Psalm 147, 12)

“What are the poor people to whom we give charity but our porters, whom we hire to transfer our assets from earth to heaven? You give the stuff to your porter; he carries what you give him to heaven. ‘How,’ you say, ‘does he carry it to heaven? Look, I see him spending it all on food.’ But that’s just it; it’s by spending it on food, not by keeping it, that he transports it. Christ has received what you have given. It has been received by the one who gave you the means to give it. It has been received by the one who at the end will give you himself.” (Sermon 389,5)

Hunger is the result of this inequitable distribution of the world’s goods. Distribution is based on values, on what we as a society value or consider important. In this, the bloodiest of times, in which wars have wiped out 109 million people, that chilling, numbing statistic pales alongside the fact that today 35,000 children under the age of five will have died from hunger, malnutrition and the diseases associated with these evils. That adds up to 13 million children each year. A war with 35,000 deaths per day would certainly merit the justifiable repudiation of any society.

Augustine says it in the following fashion:

“Do you think it’s a small matter that you are eating someone else’s food? Listen to the Apostle: We have brought nothing into this world. You have come into the world, you have found a table spread before you. But the Lord’s is the earth and its fullness. (Psalm 24:1) God bestows the world on the poor; God bestows it on the rich. (Sermon 29, 2-4)

Hunger has no reason for being if God has created enough food for all and all are equal before God. But hunger does exist and is responsible for that obscene statistic quoted above. When will that knowledge make the reality unacceptable in public opinion?

Here we come to the heart of the matter: helping the poor is a matter of justice. That is an underlying principle of our social responsibility as understood by Augustine.

A Psalm of Invocation (from Psalm 67)

Leader: God, show kindness and bless us.

All: And make your face to smile on us.

Leader: For then the earth will acknowledge your ways

All: And all nations know your power to save.

Leader: Let the nations praise you, God.

All: Let the nations praise you.

Leader: Let the nations shout and sing for joy.

All: Since you bring true justice to the world.

Leader: The soil has given its harvest.

All: God, our God, has blessed us.

Leader: May God bless us, and let God be feared.

All: To the very ends of the earth!

Hymn of Praise and Thanksgiving

Bidding Prayers

The Leader may begin by expressing aloud prayers of thanksgiving, or praise, or petition or supplication for forgiveness. The Leader may then invite worshipers to offer any prayers that they may wish to speak aloud. People respond by saying, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Closing Prayer

Leader: Most gracious God, who gives the fruits of the earth for the benefit of all your creatures, we give thanks to you for abundant harvests and plentiful food. We pray for those in our land who are denied these gifts, and we seek your forgiveness for our complicity in their want. We pray for those whose voices are not heard and for those who do not hear. For give us when our choices are selfish ones, and forgive us especially when we do not choose to raise our own voice against the pain of those among us who suffer needless want. Most of all, God, we give you thanks for the revelation of your love in Jesus Christ, who came that everyone might have abundant life. We pray in Jesus' name. **All:** Amen.

Blessing

- Permission is granted to download, duplicate and distribute this Prayer Service for World Food Day for use as an aid to prayer. Please credit the Augustinian Secretariate for Justice and Peace and www.midwestaugustinians.org/justpaxworldfoodprayer.html. Include the words "Used with permission" if printed