

ARE CRUMBS ENOUGH?

“. . . even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Yes, but would they be happy? Would they be satisfied?

If you have, or have ever had a dog, you know the routine. It comes galloping over to the kitchen or dining room table at suppertime, looks up at you with those sad but hopeful eyes and licks its chops as if to say “Do you have something for me? I know you do. You can’t fool me. I could smell it from the living room. C’mon and give it to me!”

You try to ignore the staring and the soft whimpering as best you can, but it continues unabated. After a while, when you can’t take it any longer, you point your finger and order the dog to go away. “Okay, that’s it! Go lay down!”

Yeah. Like that’s really going to happen. Fido just sits there next to the table, giving you an unspoken order of his own. “Gimmie, gimmie, gimmie!” You turn your gaze back to the table and see a basket of warm dinner rolls. Mmmm, good. You grab one of the rolls, break off a piece of it and pick up the knife lying beside your plate to spread some butter on it; but for some reason or another you get distracted or you just aren’t paying enough attention to what you’re doing, and you drop that piece of dinner roll on the floor.

Faster than you can say, “Walkie!” the dog lunges for it and quickly consumes it. Then the dog sits down next to the table again and looks up at you with those sad but hopeful eyes, as if to say “You got something else for me? I know you do. You can’t fool me. C’mon and give it to me!”

So, yeah, although the family dogs are allowed to eat the children’s (or even the adults’) crumbs that fall on the floor—after all, it’s easier and a lot more convenient than grabbing a broom or hauling out the vacuum— even so, those dogs aren’t going to be satisfied with just a few crumbs. They will always want more. After all, they’re only crumbs.

If the Lord decides to bless us with some crumbs that fall from the table, will we be satisfied? Will it be enough for us? Will we come away from under the table content and happy? Or will we feel somewhat cheated. Will we feel a bit of resentment in our hearts and wonder why we didn’t get more?

In a wonderful book I recently read called *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina

Wiederkehr, the author wrote: “We stand in the midst of nourishment and we starve. We dwell in the land of plenty, yet we persist in going hungry. Not only do we live in the land of plenty; we have the capacity to be filled with the utter fullness of God. In the light of such possibility, what happens? Why do we drag our hearts? Lock up our souls? Why do we limp? . . . Why do we live so feebly, so dimly?

Wiederkehr offered this answer to those questions she posed: “The reason we live life so dimly and with such divided hearts is that we have never really learned how be present [in a worthy or meaningful way] to God, to self, to others, to experiences and events, to all created things. We have never learned to gather up the crumbs of whatever appears in our path at every moment. We meet all of these lovely gifts only half [aware] of them.

“Presence,” wrote Wiederkehr, “is what we are all starving for. Real presence! We are too busy to be present, too blind to see the nourishment and salvation in the crumbs of life, in the experiences of each moment. Yet the secret of daily life is this: *There are no leftovers!*”

These days, the “real presence” that Wiederkehr wrote about is called “mindfulness.” Mindfulness, or being mindful, simply means being acutely aware, being fully present to all of God’s gifts and their incredible, miraculous glory, in the small “crumbs” that fall from God’s banquet table every day and bless us. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s well-known quote is the perfect illustration of what I mean.

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
and every common bush afire with God,
But only [those] who see take off [their] shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.”

When we’re mindful, when we’re completely aware of the crumbs of God’s blessings that come to us in life and in the world around us, that’s when we find “common bush[es] afire with God” everywhere we go. And we can gather up crumbs to eat from under God’s table, every day of our lives. So many crumbs, in fact, that they will be a genuine feast for us! We won’t have crawl out from under God’s banquet table still hungry. And we will be satisfied!

Quoting once again from Macrina Wiederkehr and her *Tree Full of Angels* book, “There is nothing—no thing, no person, no experience, no thought, no joy or pain—that cannot be harvested and used for nourishment on our journey to God.”

So, what are the little crumbs in your life that have blessed you and you can use for spiritual nourishment? What are some of the ordinary moments, events, people, places and things that fall down from the Lord’s Table that you

like a hungry puppy dog, might feast on?

I believe that, if we're mindful enough and sharply aware enough of God's presence and activity at every moment, then almost everything in our lives can become like a trail of small crumbs; and when we follow the trail and gather up the crumbs for nourishment, it will bring us ever closer to God's holy presence. Think about that for a moment. Every experience, every thought, every word, every person in our life is part of God's spiritual food for us. But because they seem like mere crumbs and not the whole loaf of bread we really want, we tend not to notice or pay attention to them. But if and when we do become aware of them and feast on them, they can nourish and satisfy our souls.

Doesn't that sound like a wonderful way to live? To be fully mindful of the crumbs, the small blessings that constantly fall down to us from God's table for us to collect, feast on, and allow them to spiritually energize us. The more mindful we are that every small crumb of blessing in our lives is a gift from God that we can feed on and be grateful for, the more everything in our lives—including our pain and our struggles—has the potential to bless us.

Even when you're at a drive-through at *Starbucks*, as Carol Graham was.

On more than one occasion, Graham wrote, I have pulled up to the drive-through window at *Starbucks* and the cashier has said, "No charge! The person in front of you is paying it forward." It's a nice way to start the day. I always wish I could run after that person to thank him or her. Consequently, I always watch my rearview mirror to see if someone I deem "worthy" of that gesture is behind me. Once in a while I do, and I feel like a naughty schoolgirl who just got away with something when I pay for their coffee. I trust that my generosity is appreciated, although that isn't why I do it. Giving in secret is much more rewarding—and fun!

That particular morning, I glanced in my rearview mirror when I got to the drive-through window to pay. An attractive middle-aged woman was driving a shiny sports car with the top down. I could see her gold jewelry glistening in the sunshine. I smiled to myself, thinking, "No way does she need me to buy her coffee!" I imagined she had more money than she knew what to do with; but then a voice shouted in my heart: "Pay for her coffee!"

Are you kidding me? I shouldn't have been buying a special coffee for myself, let alone a stranger driving a flashy sport car and wearing expensive gold jewelry, neither of which I could afford. My finances were tight and I was already feeling guilty for spending money on my own coffee. I cringed, but I told the cashier, "Please put that convertible's order on my tab." As soon as I said it, I felt relief. I knew I had been obedient to that little voice in my heart—God's whisper—and that was all that really mattered.

I paid the server and proceeded to the parking lot. I had a quick errand to run. When I got back to my car, the red convertible was parked next to mine. "Hi," the lady said. She was gorgeous and reeked of money. "I want to thank you for the coffee this morning. I never expected that."

"You're welcome. I was just paying it forward." I smiled and started to get in my car.

"Do you have a minute?" she asked.

I nodded and she started to cry.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this, but I need to let you know how much I appreciate that cup of coffee this morning."

"There's no need to thank me. I was happy to do it." I felt a twinge of guilt, as I wasn't being totally honest.

"My husband and I may have to declare bankruptcy," she told me. "Our business partner swindled us out of all our holdings and left us in the cold. This couldn't have come at a worse time as we lost our son to cancer last month. He was only twenty-six years old. Our hearts are breaking, and we aren't thinking clearly. I blamed God and asked Him why He didn't care. I told Him it wasn't fair and there were moments when I didn't know if I could go on. I needed a sign that God still loved me and everything would work out. When you bought my coffee this morning, I knew that was my sign. I had no idea God cared enough to tell a stranger to buy my coffee. Thank you so much. I will never forget this, especially when I'm feeling alone."

Now I was the one who was fighting back tears. I told her that I could relate on both counts. We, too, had recently lost our son, and we had also lost our business to partners who stole it from us. I shared how God does indeed care, and He would mend her broken heart. We chatted for a few more minutes, exchanged phone numbers, and set up a coffee date.

Afterwards I sat in my car for a few minutes, visibly shaken. I believe I gave her much more than a cup of coffee that morning. I will be her friend and confidante. I will lend support. She will know she isn't alone. And the next time I'm at a drive-through window and feel the urge to pay it forward, there will be no hesitation.

The woman driving the fancy red sports car and wearing expensive gold jewelry, the woman Carol Graham bought a coffee for at a *Starbucks* drive-through, could have considered that gesture to be trivial and insignificant. Let's face it, that coffee wasn't going to make her financial troubles go away, or bring her twenty-six year old son back from the dead. Certainly not. Yes, it was a kind gesture, to be sure but in the whole scheme of things, and measured against the sad and painful events that happened in her life, a total stranger unexpectedly

buying her a coffee was, on the surface, a mere crumb.

But it was enough.

It was enough to let the woman know she wasn't alone in her pain and sorrow. It was enough to reassure her that kindness and benevolence still existed in an often cold and unfair world. It was enough to rekindle her faith in a loving God and reassure her that God still loved her and cared about her.

Sometimes, my friends, all we can afford to give a needy or hurting person is a mere crumb. We might think it's not much, but then we discover that it was still enough to help them. And sometimes the only thing another person is able to give us is a mere crumb. We might think it's not much, but then we discover that it was still enough to help us. The same thing is true for God.

"Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs," the frantic, desperate Syrophenician woman said to Jesus. Her daughter was suffering and needed help. And in deep and trusting faith she asked for, pleaded for, begged Jesus for a crumb from God. If Jesus wouldn't give her the whole loaf of bread, at least give her a morsel, a crumb she and her sick daughter could feed on. Just a crumb of blessing so small, maybe it even fell under God's radar after it had been dropped and had rolled under the table for the dogs to devour.

She told Jesus that she would take such a small crumb from him. It would be enough. Jesus gave her that crumb. And it was more than enough.

This is what I hope we will take from this morning's Gospel story of the Syrophenician woman and her encounter with Christ. When we pray to God and petition our Maker for healing or good fortune or anything else, may we never be disappointed or irritated or turn away from God in resentment when the response seems like a mere crumb. Because maybe crumbs are all God has for us on that particular occasion. Maybe crumbs are all God is able to give us at that moment, for whatever reason.

So, let's thank God for the crumbs God grants us, trusting that because those crumbs have fallen down to us from God's table, they will be enough. Amen.