

## **FEEDING AND FED AT THE ALTAR**

Sermon by Rev. Greg Johnson  
at the Ordination/Installation Service for Joseph Singh  
September 20, 2015 @ Our Saviour, Etobicoke, ON

*“I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy”*

It didn't seem too long after Joseph arrived to be our outreach worker that a small wheeled cupboard was purchased from Canadian Tire, assembled on the tile floor by our fireside room, stocked with the most limited menu of rice, beans and tuna and The Our Saviour Lutheran Church Food Bank was born. It began slowly with 8-10 needy people coming each week with the great eternal goal: “We feed the body that we might feed the soul.”

Today we feed, on average, 450 people. We feed them that we might have opportunity to feed the greater hunger with God's Word, through personal witness, the Word of God carried through our hymn sing, and even a Thursday Ascension Day Service over the last couple of years and this year, a special St. Barnabas Day service. We will look for opportunity to celebrate more of the festivals in the church, especially those falling on a Thursday this year.

Joseph has been instrumental in all of these things.

Someone asked following Joseph's call service, “What changes?” What changes will take place now that He is ordained?

He has already proclaimed Christ in his personal witness, conducted Bible Studies, attended pastoral conferences and even led worship services. What more is there?

Some things readily come to mind of most. He will have the title Reverend following this service. His new title will be printed in our bulletins, letterhead and newsletters. He will be called Pastor Singh or Pastor Joseph. I'm not sure which will stick. He is vested with a red stole. He might wear a clerical collar. He joins the ministerium of Lutheran Church–Canada. Many hope that his ministry among us will carry a renewed sense of authenticity which will attract many from the Hindi/Urdu speaking community to our worship services.

But the greatest thing of all, which brings the fullest fulfillment of our outreach efforts of feeding the body that we might feed the soul, is that Joseph will now “go to the altar of God” to feed those whom he has catechized, the most nourishing and precious food that God has given to His Church. Joseph will consecrate bread and wine and feed God's people using their heart language the precious body and blood of our crucified and risen Lord. This is a sacred task which, among many sacred tasks, he has been called to do.

And I am pleased that he will be able to do so on a weekly basis, as the congregation gathers, as he's called to the home of shut-ins, and to the sick and dying.

Joseph will go to the altar of God.

To the world, to those not yet fully initiated into the mysteries of God, it would seem that all the things which I first mentioned about titles and ceremony would be most important but to God, for Joseph to bring our Lord's body and blood to feed a hungry people is so much more important.

The psalmist knows his spiritual hunger, both of God's people and himself. He wrestles with it. Pray the psalm. Maybe your pastor has told you at some point to pray the psalms. What does this mean to “pray the psalm”? Identify with the psalmist. Empathize. Sympathize. By the Spirit enter into the passion of it! Even sing it if you have the ability!

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go in mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me while they say to me continually, "Where is My God?"* (Psalm 42:5,9,10)

As the thoughts flowed into psalm 43 which we chanted in English, it seems that the psalmist's hunger increases. He struggles with rejection, oppression, even despair.

He finds relief: *"I will go to the altar of God..."* And he finds more than mere relief. He finds joy! This is the Bread of Heaven!

Joseph and those whom he serves as a pastor will likewise find relief saying "I will go to the altar of God." Yet how much greater shall his relief be for he knows in greater degrees, Christ to be the fulfillment of all. Abraham and all the other Patriarchs, Prophets and Priests could only have longed to see our day, that is Joseph Singh's day, my day, your day, whereby we more fully behold "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Now, the Psalmist, of course goes to Old Testament era altars. He goes to sacrifice animals. He goes to shed blood or have blood shed for him. He goes following the law, "without the shedding of blood, there is no atonement for sin" (Hebrews 9). Without atonement for sin there is no life or salvation.

Joseph comes knowing that Christ is the fulfillment of the law. It is our Lord who offered up his life, once and for all, at Calvary who continues to feed us at this altar. Joseph declares with John the Baptizer and all God's people in liturgy the Agnus Dei, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Behold the blood of the perfect sacrifice who knew no sin. Behold the powerful sacrifice which would shake the Temple and rent the curtain in twain. Behold the "blood of God"!

May the mystery never become rote or mere ritual or mere symbol but always what it ought to be, "Spirit filled mystery whereby we kneel in true worship and adoration." Allow Joseph time to prepare to celebrate the mystery. He feeds the body, never with this as an end in itself, but as a means to develop relationships, make disciples, baptize, catechize and share this greatest gift of all. He is tasked with distributing the Body of Christ, forgiving sins, strengthening souls for service, to feed the faithful sustenance to sustain them into eternity past the gates to their heavenly home.

To join himself and his hearers at this altar "with Angels and Archangels" and the whole company of heaven. May Joseph walk by faith and not by sight so that in faith he may see this great and glorious task as most important of His calling and works.

What will be different about Joseph Singh as he is ordained to be Pastor? He is called to be a Steward of these mysteries of God. It is no easy task. He carries the weight of such a yoke in His stole but he has the promise of his Lord, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." As Joseph finds himself fed at the altar, may he in turn feed others. In the name of Jesus we pray.

*Amen.*