People do not live by bread alone ... but they do live by bread! The First Lesson does not allow us to overspiritualize the kindness of God and turn it into something above or even against creation. The writer speaks of brooks, fountains and springs, of wheat and barley, of vines, fig trees, and pomegranates, of olive trees and honey, even of iron and copper.

People do not live by bread alone, but by bread and every other good that comes from the mouth of God. Israelites would have thought of the manna that appeared miraculously in the wilderness. They knew thereby that food was gift, not human achievement. Creation is not just something that happened "way back then"; it is something that happens when God issues commands and promises to rain and soil, to farmer, food-transporter, and merchant, and to all of us who work—in exciting and humdrum ways—to put bread on the table. From his mouth to our mouth—that's the great food chain.

People live also by every other good word that comes from the mouth of God. We think first of all of that Word made flesh, who came to speak our language and, through his death, to help us live. We need to underline the continuity between the God who speaks so that nature obeys and who also bespeaks us righteous. We also might think of God's exhortations: Keep the commandments; walk in my ways; fear me (v. 6). We think of the word that created stars and sunsets, laughing children and senior citizens at peace, problems in the family and the wherewithal to resolve them. Those are the things from the mouth of God that give life texture, variety, depth, and meaning.

But some barely have enough bread or any other word from God to enable them to live. Might God be testing them/us so that our ears might be opened once again to recognize the source of all life? (v. 3) Might this whole passage with its talk of the end of scarcity and the lack of nothing (v. 9) seem irrelevant to those who lost their farm this year, or who existed on food stamps this year, or who found their faith falling apart this year? God disciplines some of his children so that they can live (v. 5), but it is illogical—and immoral—to assume that those who lack are being disciplined. Another place Deuteronomy states: "There shall be no poor among you." (15:4) That's the law of the land; that's another word from the mouth of God by which we are to live. Or again: "If there is among you a poor person, one of your sisters or brothers, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor sister or brother, but you shall open your hand to them, and lend them sufficient for their need, whatever it may be." (15:7-8) God's love for people is usually spoken to people not by pastors nor even by the Bible, but by fellow Christians who say, "I love you"; "I'm for you and with you"; "Don't be afraid." People live from every word that comes from the mouth of God as it is filtered and channeled through our hearts and lives and mouths.

And you shall bless the Lord! (v. 10) When you think about this sentence, the direction of the action seems to be all wrong. Thanksgiving Day is the festival that speaks of the blessings we receive from God, not the blessings we give to him. Yet this expression occurs some 40 times in the Old Testament. One scholar calls such a blessing a joyful outcry of...
thankfulness and admiration. As with every act of thanksgiving it is simultaneously an act of proclamation: “Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” (Ps 96:2) Or it is self-admonition: “Bless the Lord, 0 my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Ps 103:2) Or it is something done, like our thanksgiving celebrations, in the presence of sisters and brothers: “In the great congregation I will bless the Lord.” (Ps 26:12) The whole creation joins us in blessing God: “All your works shall give thanks to you, 0 Lord, and all your holy ones shall bless you” (Ps. 145:10).

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