

Eighteenth Sunday of the Year August 02, 2015

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35

Today's liturgy and the Word of God present us with Jesus as the Bread of Life. Bread is a substance known and used by every society on the face of the earth. It is a gift of God to humanity adapted by the nature in order to be a source of nourishment. In the Old Testament we have to God who took care of his people by giving them food for their survival. He gave them Manna in the desert which was the type of divine bread placed before his chosen people. In the New Testament Jesus calls himself the bread of Life and tells us that those who eat him will live forever. Jesus presents himself as the person who wants to be part of us. He is what the whole world needs, he satisfies all those who partake of him, there isn't a person on the world who can't tolerate him, and there isn't a person who won't enjoy him when they meet him. He tells the disciples that he is the real bread we all need this bread that has come down from heaven and they have to believe in him. To believe in a person is to make an investment of one's whole self. It is an act of faith, of trust and a letting go. It is much more than just accepting what a person says as being true. Indeed, the person who comes to him will never go hungry. In the first reading from the Book of Exodus God becomes the provider when there was real lack of food for the people of Israel and they were afraid that they may die, God comes to their aid giving them bread from heaven. In the second reading Paul invites all to possess life eternal by giving up sin and selfishness. He tells the Ephesians not to live an aimless life but a life centered on Jesus

Today's First Reading from the Book of Exodus tells us about the bread from heaven given to the Israelites by God when they were in the desert. God had miraculously brought them out of the land of Egypt liberating them from slavery but they were unable to place their full trust in the leaders God had given them. They were looking back towards Egypt instead of facing the direction God had given them. The Pharaoh had been gathering straw for his bricks and God had been gathering food to keep them alive. To give the people every spiritual advantage God provides them with bread that surpasses anything Egypt offered them. Manna was the gift that had come from God for them. For them it was the perfect food for the journey. They were able to collect it in the morning and move on towards the place God had prepared for them. The manna was a honeydew excretion produced by two species of scale insect that infested the tamarisk thickets of the area in the desert. God also provided them with quails to eat surpassing the fleshpots of Egypt. The quail was a small migrating game bird that resembles the partridge passing through the desert. But Manna also included the test in faith. The people were instructed to rely on God each day for the food they needed. Any attempt of self-sufficiency did not work for Manna got spoilt the next day, except on the Sabbath day. All this was in response to the complaints that people made against God and Moses. God took care of them and gave them physical food as well as the spiritual food.

The Second Reading Paul tells the Ephesians of the absolute condition that is required for spiritual renewal, namely, the necessity to clothe themselves with the new self, the new life that has been created in the likeness of God. Paul asks the Christians to put away their former life, their old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, meaning weakness of human nature. To put away one's former life and to clothe oneself with the new self belongs to God through their baptism. In the early days of the Church, the candidates would symbolically remove their old clothes, plunge into the water and then put on new white clothing. This external sign signified an inner change, that the convert had put aside his former life, to accept Christ

through faith, and was now, in Christ, beginning a new life. Here Paul uses three designations for our Savior: Lord, Christ, Jesus. All three point to the authority of Jesus who teaches us how to live. Ultimately it is God the Father who enables people to abandon their old way of life and be renewed in Spirit. They can now live a life of righteousness and holiness dedicated to God the father as Jesus was.

The Gospel of today tells us what took place immediately after the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and feeding the five thousand people. Jesus escaped to the mountains to avoid people from making him their king. Jesus at any time did not want to be a political king. Nor did he want the disciples to be influenced by the ideas of the crowd. Hence he forces his disciples to cross the sea by boat. The next morning, it did not take long for the crowd to realize that Jesus had disappeared. The crowd then went looking for him. As such, they set out to Capernaum where Jesus and his disciples were known to resort. When they found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they asked when he had come to that place. The first time they had gone looking for him Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Now the welcome was totally different. He told them directly that it was not out of love or devotion that they came to him. He confronted them saying they had truly come not because of any signs they had seen but because they had seen the miracle of loaves. They did not understand the meaning of what Jesus was doing with regard to his teaching and the miracle. Perhaps they did not even want to understand; they were just seeking their own immediate benefit. Jesus, through his humanity, was representing the presence of God in the world. His presence indicated that God is the source of all our needs: material needs, social needs, emotional needs, and spiritual needs. The abundant feeding with the bread and fish was a sign of much deeper nourishment that comes from God. The same God was ready to offer them more if they were ready to listen and accept him. The crowd was working for ordinary food while Jesus was offering them nourishment that brought with it eternal life. They were still not satisfied. They asked for a sign which would give them a reason for believing in Jesus.

The Gospel passage of today unfolds around a series of questions that a crowd addressed to Jesus. The central dynamic between Jesus and this crowd had been one of misunderstanding. The opening scene presents the crowd in a bit of consternation because they had been looking for Jesus and they could not find him. Eventually they did discover him at Capernaum. Jesus was not impressed with the enthusiasm of the crowd. They were pursuing Jesus because he gave them bread to eat and accused them of seeking him out only because they got plenty to eat when he abundantly fed them. They had their own reason to follow him and they missed the sign value of that amazing event. Jesus at this moment challenged them by asking them to work for the bread that will last. Jesus indicated that a person can often become preoccupied with various things and can have enough and more but may not give sufficient time to the spiritual nature which can remain undernourished. The Lord directed them to discover for themselves the moments wherein they ought to discover God and his place in their lives. These were the moments that were unique and beyond the ordinary chores of life and that involved some amount of segregation from the routine and earthly situations. He points out to them of the necessity of replenishing their inner spirit. Jesus invited them to a spirit of happiness through a deeper relationship with God and at the same time made them come into contact with their innermost and deep desires. He called to look for food that is spiritual which would nourish their souls.

Further in his discourse Jesus instructed the people that they were not to work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures forever, which the Son of Man would give them.

Those Words of Jesus taken from Prophet Isaiah were a call to work for eternal life. While one is called to work for earthly bread, he is also called to work for eternal life. He admonished them that the earthly bread, shall pass but the eternal life, shall remain forever. They found it difficult to understand and they asked what they must do to perform the works of God. The reply of Jesus was simple, that they have to believe in him whom the heavenly Father had sent. Jesus in fact called them to faith and trust in him and his works. As Jesus tried to enlighten the crowd regarding his life giving Divinity, the crowd argued among themselves that Jesus had only multiplied earthly bread. Yet, through Moses, God had given his people “bread from heaven.” These people failed to realize the prophetic nature of the manna, the bread from Heaven. Still they asked him for the divine bread. They could not grasp that Jesus was speaking of non-physical bread and that he could give this heavenly Bread, they had not yet understood that Jesus had identified himself as that Bread. But they had heard wrongly and they were still thinking of material food. They were still seeing the multiplication of the loaves and fish in a purely literal way. It is like the Samaritan woman at the well who wanted the “living” water that Jesus said he could give her. She wanted an unending supply so that she would not have to go to the well again.

The crowd continued to misunderstand the deeper level that Jesus was trying to get them to understand. They thought that the works of God refer to something that can be accomplished by human effort. Jesus on the other hand was telling them point blank that works of God refer to having faith in the one that God sent, namely Jesus himself. When Jesus told the people “I am the Bread of Life,” he used the words “I am” for the first time during his ministry on earth. In those days, when those two words were spoken together in that particular order, they implied that God was speaking. Those two words were so sacred that no one dared to say them. It was forbidden to say them because they implied that one was God or His equal. When Jesus used those words during His arrest in the garden, Judas, the police from the chief priests and the Pharisees stepped back and fell to the ground. Yet, Jesus used the words when He said, “I am the Bread of Life.” He was telling the people that He was God, the Giver of Life.” Jesus concluded His discourse by saying that “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” He is now the consoler, the God who cares and the one who looks after the hungry. The crowd wanted Jesus to produce a sign that he truly the one sent by God. The irony was that they totally missed the sign Jesus had just recently given them.

Jesus made a fresh attempt to break through the crowd’s misunderstanding by interpreting their own reference to their ancestors receiving manna in the desert. Referring back to the events narrated in the Book of Exodus concerning Manna, Jesus declared that it was God and not Moses who provided that miraculous bread from heaven. He extended his argument by saying that the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven to give life to the world. Finally, in response to the crowd’s request to receive this bread, Jesus made his final move by proclaiming that he himself is the bread of life that will totally nourish anyone who would believe in him. At this point the bread of life refers to the reality of God present in the person of Jesus. When Jesus says he is the Bread of Life, we generally think of the Eucharist. But what Jesus said was much more than mere Eucharist. With the words, Jesus is the Bread of Life; we primarily mean that Jesus is the source of a full life. If we follow him, we will know the experience of a life which is full of truth, of love, of compassion, of friendship, of justice, of freedom, of peace. We will become people who are “fully human, fully alive”. We will become not just persons but intra-persons, inter-persons, and meta-persons. In other words, we will have good relations with ourselves, with the people around us, with people everywhere. We become fully one with Jesus. At the same time we must realize that the

Word of God is real food. St Jerome tells us that not to know the Scripture is not to know Jesus. Secondly the community with Jesus the head is the bread of life. Further his presence in the day to events is nourishing us too. His glory is available in the universe.

In today's reading we hear of the lack of faith of those Galileans, of their utter worldliness and their total lack of interest in their future life. Jesus explained to them how wrong their attitude is towards life. They were all concentrating on the things of present life and never bothered about their future life. They were looking for the earthly bread while Jesus was offering them the heavenly bread. They were holding on strongly to the desert experience of their ancestors but did not bother about the present life. Jesus offered them the future life and invited them to believe in him, the true bread of life. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us thank the Lord for his gift of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life. The Lord God has blessed us richly with the Gift of Life to guide us in the way, the truth and the life. He tells us that whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty.

One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden, and he was gloating and boasting. "Yes, sir, I just caught the world full of people down there. Set me a trap used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got them all!" "What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked. Satan replied, "Oh, I'm going to have fun! I'm going to teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other, how to drink and smoke and curse. I'm going to teach them how to invent guns and bombs and kill each other. I'm really going to have fun!" "And what will you do when you get done with them?" Jesus asked. "Oh, I'll kill them," Satan glared proudly. "How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked. "Oh, you don't want those people. They aren't any good. Why, you'll take them and they'll just hate you. They'll spit on you, curse you and kill you!! You don't want those people!!" "How much?" He asked again. Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, "All your tears, and all your blood." Jesus said, "DONE!" Then He paid the price.

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