

18th Sunday, Ordinary time, Year B: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Ps 77; Ephesians 4:17, 20124; John 6:24-35

Introduction: Last week, we saw how Jesus fed the people with the bread of life but when they came back the next day for more, he said to them, “do not work for perishable food, work instead for the food that endures to eternal life”. We are here precisely for that, to seek after the food that endures to eternal life, that is, Jesus himself.

Homily: In our first reading, we see that the Israelites were tempted to make a U turn to Egypt, to follow the compass of their stomachs rather than the focus on the way to freedom through the wilderness. Slavery with good foods looked more attractive to them than freedom on a starvation diet. God hears the complaints of Israel and promises that they shall eat meat and have bread to their heart's content. In the morning there is a “thin delicate, powdery” on the surface of the desert. When the people ask Moses what it was, he tells them it is “the bread the Lord gives you to eat”. The miracle of manna in the desert is a sign of God’s providential care for his people and by extension to all of us who are his people and who make of his family, the Church.

In today's Gospel reading, another crowd follow instructions of their stomach and express their longing for material food. This time it is the crowd of Galileans who, on the previous day, ate to their heart's content when Jesus offered them a meal of barely loaves. Now they followed Jesus to Capernaum, his base on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd is hungry again. Jesus tells his hungry pursuers that they were only following him because they have enjoyed the food that physically satisfies them; they should work instead for the food that endures for eternal life. One way of doing this is to believe in God's son, Jesus Christ. The Galileans demanded for a sign to prove this. Jesus showed himself as the sign, the bread of life which endures to eternal life.

They promise that Jesus held out to his Galilean audience is same as he holds out to us today, the holy people of God here and now in this Church. The one hunger that all of us share in this gathering is that of the Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. We hunger for love that does not disappoint. In this Mass we long for the love of our tender God which is offered in word and the sacrament. Vatican II says that the Church never ceases to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the body of Christ [Dei Verbum 21]. The Eucharist is a word that flows into deed; it is an action. It is the act of participating in the bread of life, in the very life of Christ himself. Our being in the Church is a demonstration that we cannot solely rely on our own resources: we need Jesus the bread of life to sustain us.

It is not only the body that gets hungry, the spirit and the heart does too. Material bread is not enough to nourish the heart of a human being. To nourish a human being is not the same as feeding or fattening a dog or a cattle. We humans need a lot more than mere material food. Not all our hungers can be satisfied. Some of them are mere appetite which can destroy us if we feed them. The more they are fed, the hungrier and more demanding they become. The deeper hunger that we all nurse and which underlies every other hunger is that of love. We long to love and to be loved.

Jesus tells us today that he is the bread of life, the food that endures to eternal life. He challenges us to work very hard to have him as his love is sincere and endures forever. It might be worthwhile asking ourselves a few questions: What sort of hunger do we have now? What do we do? What are our efforts to satisfy it? What do we do when the well runs dry? Do we panic when there is no

energy left? When we do when we reach our panic button and what happens after that? The panic varies: For instance, it could be a big personal plan about the future, work, relationships, finances (mortgage), sickness, family, colleague or neighbor from Hell, etc. Anxiety weakens and drains us when we discover that the well has gone dry with no promise of water.

The promise that Jesus held out to the Galileans is the very one he holds out to us today. It is the promise that finds its fulfillment in the Mass that we celebrate in this Church, here and now. The Lord tells us that he feeds both the material and the spiritual. He wants us to hand over our lives and unnecessary anxieties to him. After sharing in the celebration of Jesus, this bread of life, let us, in the memorable words of Bob Marley “raise our hopes and smiles with the rising sun”. Jesus challenges us to surrender all that we are to the safe hand of providence.

Among us in this congregation, there are some people who are outstandingly resilient and faithful, refusing to give up. They press on relentlessly in the face of huge challenges and overwhelming odds. They prefer to look on the bright side of things especially when darkness is near enough. Jesus wants us to emulate this form of healthy living. The soul’s bread is Christ. Jesus tells us that he is the living bread come down from heaven (Jn 6:51). He gives food to us and gives us vision of the world to come. St. Paul says “...for Christ dwells in you by faith and faith in Christ is Christ in your heart (Eph 3:17). The measure of your faith in Christ is the measure of your possession of him, the bread of life.