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18th Ordinary Sunday - 1 August 2021

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1 August 2021

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

Jesus teaches the people and the disciples that he is the bread of life, and that whoever comes to him will never hunger, and whoever believes in him will never thirst. As the bread of God, Jesus feeds not just the people of Israel but the whole world.

Collect of the Sunday

The main thrust of our opening prayer takes its focus from the faithful's acclamation of God as their 'creator' and 'guide'. In light of this, they are confident that God will be present to them and grant bountiful assistance. In particular, they request that God, in divine government, restore and preserve as restored, what God has created. However, the broader liturgical usage of the terms 'creator', 'guide', 'restore' and 'keep safe' bespeaks a far richer understanding of the oration. Together they put forward God's entire economy of creation, salvation and renewal. 'Creator' and 'guide' point to the original creation narrated in Genesis, the ongoing creation of all that is good, and to the recreation in Christ of sinful humanity and sin-damaged creation. Implicit in the divine creative activity is God's continuing care and maintenance of what God has established in love. God's governance and preservation denote the consolation, inspiration, direction, healing and sanctification that God provides to protect the faithful from sin and to lead them to eternal life.

In the ancient sources the prayer was used in Lent, highlighting the need for restoration and God's ongoing preservation. There is also a strong historical link to the vicissitudes suffered by the Christian citizens of Rome during a siege by the Arian king Witiges in 537. In that light it is not surprising that the restoration of an original order of peace and security be uppermost in their minds. If God restores it, then God can also be depended upon to preserve it.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the abundance of God. Lord, have mercy.
You satisfy our hunger and thirst. Christ, have mercy.
You are the Bread of Life. Lord, have mercy.

First Reading

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

The people of Israel grumble about their situation and turn on their leaders. God reconciles their lack of trust and responds to their complaining. They are fed with manna from heaven, bread the Lord has given them to eat.

Second Reading

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Paul reminds the Ephesians of the need for ongoing renewal of mind and heart so that we can continue to embrace the life-giving truth of Christ.

Gospel Reading

John 6:24-35

Jesus teaches the people and the disciples that he is the Bread of Life, and that whoever comes to him will never hunger, and whoever believes in him will never thirst.

Reflection

With the Gospel we enter into the Bread of Life discourse. The theology and practice that is in the Last Supper narratives in the other Gospels is reproduced here in John in the miracles of the loaves and fish and the discourse of Jesus with the people around the story of the manna and his own self as the 'bread of life'.

It is best to begin with the Exodus events. There is a starkness in this Hebrew Bible story that can be confronting. The people, recently saved from slavery, grumble because they are no longer in the stable environment of slavery and are in an alien place, the desert. Their hunger leaves them afraid. But the desert can be a fertile place if the people know where to be and what to seek out. The people's grumbling is so fulsome it is focused on the leading prophet Moses and the leading priest Aaron and is heard in the heavens by God.

The people who are united in hunger are soon as one in gathering manna and quail. It seems an easy test, but the people soon adjust to the new conditions and take their fill according to the Lord's instructions. It is the Lord who meets their needs, remaining faithful to the covenant in what looks like desperate circumstances. They do not entirely forget their denunciation of Moses and Aaron, who are reminded that they have led the people out to die in the desert. In this text the leadership remains faithful to the Lord, and so teach the people: "this is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat". It is not their bushcraft or desert knowledge that has saved the people, but God. It is God who feeds the whole community without discrimination or distinction. The lead grumblers are not singled out for punishment, nor the less able left behind. The entire camp is covered with both quail and manna.

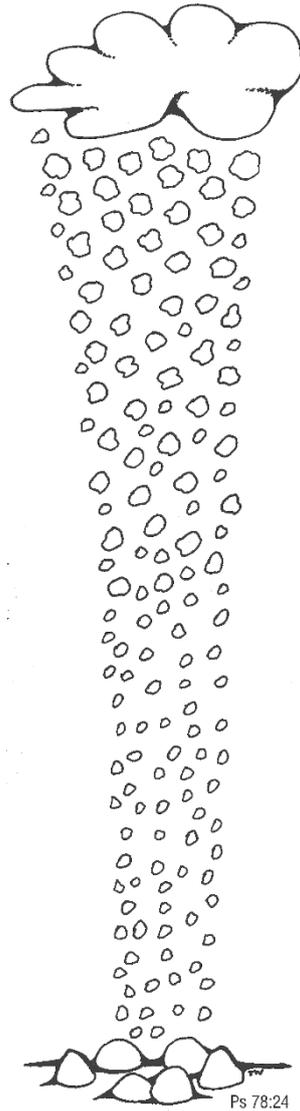
In the Gospel there is a recurrence of the manna motif, but the meaning is enlarged. It remains bread provided by the Lord, but in Jewish thought at the time of Jesus, the provision of saving 'manna' was broadened to include the saving acts of God, most especially the provision of the gift of the Law, a Law intimately connected with Moses the prophet. There is a challenge in this for Jesus. If he is to claim that he is a greater gift than Moses and the Law, he ought to produce greater miracles to verify this. This in part underlies the people's request for signs.

Jesus' response is belief in him. He is the bread that feeds the hunger of the people. As the bread of God, Jesus feeds not just the people of Israel but the whole world. Now addressed by the more modest title Rabbi, Jesus reminds the people that it was not Moses, the greatest of the prophets, who provided the manna, but God. God now too provides bread, bread to cover the 'camp' and the whole world beyond the camp. In parallel with the work of the Israelites collecting quail and manna, the work commanded by the 'Rabbi' is to devote oneself to the works of God in Jesus. Faith in Jesus and discipleship displaces devotion to the Law and the prophets. With this we are treated to language of the unity of God and Jesus, a way of speaking that is more fully fleshed out in John 8:58.

We are in the midst of John's great eucharistic discourse, setting together faith in Jesus, eating of the Bread of life, and discipleship. The reading gives these a setting within the Eucharistic practices of the Johannine community, a setting we continue to hold as the centre of our worship and our being as church. We are a eucharistic people. Has this continued through the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath? There are anecdotal reports and lengthy discussions about whether the faithful are 'coming back' to Mass in the parish. We cannot ignore this as we take up this Gospel, along with the Exodus narrative. There are different reasons for a reluctance to return. For some the online liturgies are more inspiring, and allow for choice across location, music and preaching. They also have a convenience factor and are well suited to aging and frail parishioners. More disturbing is that the loss of regular Mass has allowed attendance at any Sunday Mass to be one option amongst many others: many faithful simply do not feel anything is missing by not participating regularly in the liturgy. In part this is the breaking of habit, but also a rethinking of priorities by members of the community.

Whatever the analysis, the post pandemic parish requires a deeper rethink of past practices. If the Sunday liturgy could fade from view so quickly, then perhaps the seeds of its irrelevance had been laid before. The Gospel challenge is to ask how have we been feeding the community, how has this embedded the works of God and fidelity to Christ, and how has it built up the community and the wider world. The pandemic has provided an evangelical challenge. But it has also provided a challenge to the relevance of the church, a challenge of our own making. Has our Eucharistic practice been a sufficient sign of devotion to the works of God in Jesus? Have we provided a lived experience that fills the hunger and satiates the thirst?

The second reading continues our journey through the Letter to the Ephesians. There are no direct eucharistic resonances here. There is trademark Pauline understanding of Christ and his effects on us. In Jesus is truth. To take this up means our lives are remade. For us who are on the Christian journey already (unlike the Gentiles in the reading who provide a contrast for Paul's audience), we have an invitation to ongoing renewal in the spirit into the depths of the truth of Christ. This is the truth that satisfies our hunger and thirst.



You gave
them bread
from heaven.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The scriptures proclaim that God feeds us in an abundant way. As we celebrate this Eucharist, confident in God's love, we ask that our needs are answered.

Petitions

We pray that the Church throughout the world may continue to feed all who come through her doors with spiritual nourishment.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that the Church in Australia will feel abundantly fed by the results of the Plenary Council.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that world governments and Christian Churches will work together to assist those who need food, education and medical supplies, particularly in the face of the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are financially and socially disadvantaged. May their needs be met with dignity and compassion by our Church and charitable organisations.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who hunger for justice. May they be supported in their efforts to provide positive resolutions for those who are suffering and therefore restore their hope and dignity.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who work to serve the hungry in our Church missions, particularly in our neighbouring Myanmar. May they be renewed in body and spirit and continue the work God has asked of them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, in your abundant love, hear our prayers as we pray in the name of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Alleluia, sing to Jesus. R. H. Prichard/ W. Dix. 371
Come to the feast. M. Haugen. 400
Eat this bread. J. Berthier. 205
Gift of finest wheat. O. Westendorf/ R. Kreutz. 191
I am the bread of life. S. Toolan RSM. 204
In remembrance of you. C. Willcock SJ. 355
Let all mortal flesh keep silence. G. Moultrie/ French melody. 190
Lord, to whom shall we go? M. Herry. 189
Now in this banquet. M. Haugen. 197

AOV1

Alleluia, sing to Jesus. W. Dix/ R. Pritchard. 191
Come to the feast. M. Haugen. 151
Eat this bread. J. Berthier. 125
I am the bread of life. S. Toolan RSM. 49
In the breaking of the bread. B. Hurd. 58
Lord, to whom shall we go? M. Herry. 6

AOV2

Table of plenty. D. Schutte. 20

AOV4Kids

For the journey. G. Holmes. 128
The table of God. F. O'Brien. 8
We give thanks. T. Watts/ M. O'Brien. 105

CWB

Bread of the world in mercy broken. Reginald Heber. 631
By your priestly power, O risen Lord. James Phillip McAuley. 635
Gift of finest wheat. Omer Westendorf. 685
I am the bread of life. Suzanne Toolan. 718
Shepherd of souls, in love, come, feed us. J. Clifford Evers. 804

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions

Eat this bread, drink this cup. Taizé Community. 484
I am the bread of life. Suzanne Toolan RSM. 509
Let all mortal flesh keep silence. Trans. Gerald Moultrie. 533
Lord, to whom shall we go? Michael Herry FMS. 549
Shepherd of souls, in love, come feed us. Omer Westendorf. 596
Gift of finest wheat. Omer Westendorf. 651
Additional selections by Chris deSilva
Bread of the world in mercy broken. Reginald Heber. 460

S&S1

I am the bread of life. John Michael Talbot. 153

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 77: *The Lord gave them bread from heaven.*

Psalm 77: John Schiavone/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB

Psalm 78 (77): Jenny O'Brien. JOBB pg. 78

The Lord gave them bread: Tony Alonso. LPB pg. 133

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Taste and see (FWS) [Gifts, Communion]

The bread of life (SHOF) [Communion]



The hand of God feeds us.