

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-B

August 5, 2018

First Reading – Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 78

Second Reading – Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Gospel – John 6:24-35

My dear people of God:

Our readings for today are directly related to our sustenance while we are on our pilgrim way to heaven. Just as the Israelites had manna in the desert while on their journey to the Promised Land, we have the Eucharist, the Body of Christ Jesus on our journey to Heaven.

From our First Reading, we heard that the Israelites realized that, while God has brought them out of slavery in Egypt, their lives in the wilderness were not pleasant. Their complaint tells us that they have forgotten how Yahweh freed them from slavery. This is a serious case of distorted memory - the kind of thing that often happens when we begin to reminisce about the “good old days.” As slaves in Egypt, they had been oppressed in many ways - but they were never deprived of food. Now, they had no food in the wilderness.

Yahweh responded to their complaint by saying to Moses that He will “rain bread from the sky” to feed the people. Please note that the food was called **“bread” here, as well as in verses 12 and 15. But it would have its name, **“manna”**, in verse 31 and onward.**

Yahweh worded His instructions to make it clear that there would be more bread from heaven than the people would need for any given day. However, they were to collect only enough bread for that day. By requiring them to collect only enough to meet the needs of the day, Yahweh was testing them. Will they obey, or will they succumb to the temptation to collect more than they need for the day?

My dear people of God, I would love to presume that Jesus had this incident in mind when He composed the Our Father: the provision of daily bread for the Israelites.

Yahweh understood their need for food, even on the Sabbath, and so He provided for their need. They were to honor the Sabbath by not working on that day; because collecting manna would constitute work. Yahweh tested them if they would obey Him or would they succumb to the temptation to collect more than they needed. Those who gathered more than what they needed, failed in the test of Yahweh. Worse was that the extra bread got spoiled.

My dear people of God: God created us with a need for daily food as a reminder, over and over, that God is providing for our needs. In our homes, we say grace at every meal, in part to express our thanks to God for providing for our needs, and in part to remind ourselves that the food which we could so easily take for granted is, in fact, a blessing from God—a daily blessing.

Lamentably, many families don't even eat together, much less say grace together. That is, in part, because we have become so affluent that we take food for granted. I pray that we would never forget God, our Provider.

Let us go to the Second Reading. Paul is telling the Ephesians: "Do not live as the Gentiles do. You did not learn Christ this way." Simply put, he is saying: "you did not learn Christ by sinning"

We know that the opposite of sinning is obedience. Verse 20 must be understood to mean "you learned Christ by obedience".

The phrases "*you have heard Him*" and "*you have been taught by Him*" cannot refer to hearing the physical voice of Jesus while He was on this earth, because there is no way that all of those Christians to whom Paul was writing could have heard Jesus speak. They were separated by time and geographical distance.

Paul is using a figure of speech here to refer to the preaching and proclamation of the Word of God. Scripture tells us over and over that when we read, and study God's Word, it is as if God Himself is speaking to us. What Paul is saying here is that when they heard the Word of God proclaimed to them, they were hearing Christ. The Bible is the very Word of God. And according to the Gospel of John, Jesus is The Word, the physical manifestation of God and God's teachings here on earth. When we read and study the truth of God's Word, we are hearing Christ and are being taught by Christ.

Since we have heard Christ, and have been taught by him, there are two specific directions to learn Christ to get rid of that futile mind to renew our mind. Paul gives us the first one in verse 22.

(1) Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. If we are going to become a holy disciple of Christ, we put off the old man. The term Paul uses here for put off means to take

off, or to strip off. It is frequently used to denote getting out of filthy clothes. Paul tells us to put off (concerning our former conduct), the old man which grows according to the deceitful lusts.

(2) Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

We don't take off the dirty clothes, and then shower, and then put the old clothes back on. When we first become a Christian, we get rid of some of those old habits, some of those old ways of living, and we live clean for a while, but, if we don't replace the old with something new, we soon find that those old habits and ways of living are right back where they used to be, and stronger than ever.

This first thing is to get a new mind. Verse 23 says "be renewed in the spirit of your mind". The mind is the root cause of sin and corruption and deceitful lusts. That's what Paul showed us back in verses 17-19, and so here he says it again. If you want to gain victory over sin, you've got to begin with your mind.

Our mind is not renewed simply by gaining knowledge, but by changing the way we think. And the only way to do this is through Bible study and prayer. As we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, reading, studying, and meditating upon it, as we pray through God's Word, which is living and active, God will transform our mind, and will change our thought patterns. He will give us a whole new perspective and outlook on life. It is that simple; but it is not easy. There are no shortcuts here. It takes time, and effort and patience, and diligence and faith. As we do this, we will gain a new mind.

The second thing is to gain the new man. Believing/obeying Jesus means that we are a new creation. Paul is not telling us to renovate or remake our old man into new man. He is telling us to put on a completely new and different man. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and then strive to become like Him are made like God! This doesn't mean we become God, but that we become what God has intended for mankind. We become like Christ. Paul says here that we become like Him in His true righteousness and holiness.

Righteousness refers to how we interact in our relationships with other people. Holiness refers to how we interact in our relationship with God. These two words summarize, by the way, the ten commandments. *Clothes will make the man*. As we put on the new man, as we renew our minds, we will become new men and new women of God.

Now, let us go to the Gospel. Let us situate ourselves and imagine how the things unfolded after the multiplication of the bread and fish. We are now in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. In chapter 6, verse 1, Jesus "went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee", presumably the eastern (Gentile) side. Then in verse 16, the disciples "got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum," on the northwestern shore. They rowed three or four miles, most of the way across the lake, when Jesus walked on water coming to them. They thought they were seeing a ghost and were terrified. He calmed them. They wanted Him to join them in the boat, but **"the boat immediately reached the land toward which they were heading"** (verse 21) – which was Capernaum.

Verse 22 tells us that the following day, the crowd that remained across the lake saw that there had been only one boat, and that Jesus had not gone along with His disciples in the boat. Of course, Jesus was not with them in the boat. Please remember that Jesus walked on top of the water. Then verse 23 tells us that other boats came from Tiberias-not far from the place of the multiplication of the loaves. These two verses (22 and 23) are very telling: the people who ate the loaves and the fish were seeking Jesus; not finding Him there, they decided to sail towards Capernaum.

"When the multitude therefore saw that neither Jesus nor His disciples were in the area they supposed Him to be at, they themselves got into the boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus" (verse 24). Finding Jesus, they asked, *"Rabbi, when did you come here?"* (verse 25).

Jesus ignored their question and rebuked them for their superficial interest. *"Amen I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled"* (verse 26).

Lamentably, the crowd was focused at stomach-level rather than spirit-level. At the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus satisfied their physical hunger, and now they are looking for more of the same.

Brothers and sisters, meeting our physical needs (food, clothing, shelter, money) never loses its appeal. But Spiritual Gifts, however, are a different story; we tend not to have the same anxiety or excitement as we tend towards a new car or a job promotion. However, that will change when life pummels us and drives us to our knees. After the 9/11 tragedy, churches were full every Sunday for over six months.

"Don't work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (verse 27a). Jesus challenged the crowd to raise their eyes to see beyond the physical realm.

The people addressed Jesus as Rabbi in verse 25, but He refers to Himself as “the Son of Man” for God the Father has sealed Him” in verse 27. We all know that a seal authenticates authorship or ownership. Such a seal gives the document official status, just as a signature would do today. The bearer of such a document would be accorded the respect due the person who sealed it.

God the Father has set His seal on the Son, who acts as His emissary from heaven to earth. When the Spirit descended on Jesus (Mark 1:10; Matthew 3:16;) and a voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22), God set His seal on Him.

“What must we do, that we work the works (plural) of God?” (verse 28). Ever since the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20 ff.) the crowd asked Jesus to spell out/identify the works (plural) - the truly critical laws - so that they might focus on those. They were asking Jesus to provide them a sure and certain guide to understand the Torah which is the center of their religious practices.

Jesus directed them away from the law; but toward Himself. *“This IS* (singular) *the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent”* (verse 29).

By inviting the crowd to believe in Him, Jesus provided an achievable alternative to the hopelessly difficult task of observing/keeping the law. They have to do only one thing: Believe in the ONE whom God has sent.

They said therefore to Him, *“What then do you do for a sign, that we may see, and believe you? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. What then do you do for a sign, that we may see, and believe you?’* (verse 30).

Brothers and sisters, we know that signs have been part of human life from the very beginning when God set a bow (rainbow) in the clouds as a sign of the covenant that God would never destroy the earth by flood again (Genesis 9:12 ff.). God has employed signs of various kinds - symbols or miracles that point beyond themselves to something greater.

The (1) **Exodus from Egypt** and its accompanying miracles served as the greatest sign of all in Exodus 15:22-26) and the (2) **Manna from Heaven** (Exodus 16). These two miracles not only saved Israel, but also served as signs to authenticate Moses’ leadership and to point to God’s love and special provision for Israel.

This crowd recognized the radical nature of Jesus’ invitation and demands assurance that He should show some authority to advocate such a sweeping departure from their traditional religious practice. They wanted a sign to authenticate Him as God’s prophet, just as they considered Moses as a prophet.

For twelve centuries, they have observed Torah, the Mosaic Law, a God-given law - as the way to please God and to assure their own salvation. For centuries, their rabbis have devoted their best efforts to applying the law to every situation. Throughout Israel's history, God has called Israel again and again to the faithful observance of the law, and has called prophets to help them to understand it.

Now this carpenter from an ordinary family from an even less distinguished town Nazareth was now suggesting that they abandon their long-held allegiance to the law and stake their lives on Him. They wanted Him to authenticate His authority in some unmistakable, compelling way! To follow Him otherwise would be the height of utter recklessness. Ironically, however, the crowd seemed to have lost sight of the fact that Jesus had just authenticated His Divine Connection by feeding five thousand (or more) people with a boy's lunch!

“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat’” (verse 31). They cited the manna as the kind of sign that they were expecting from Him. They quoted the scriptures, but imprecisely – “He gave them bread from heaven to eat”. Interestingly, Jesus would point out to them that Moses' gift of manna authenticated His (Jesus) status as a prophet. If Jesus expected this crowd to accept Him as a Moses-like prophet, He must give them a Moses-like sign. He therefore said to them in verse 32: **“Most certainly, I tell you, it wasn't Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”**

Jesus makes solid points here:

1. It was God, not Moses, who gave the manna.
2. The Father gives the true bread from heaven. Therefore the manna was not the true bread that God the Father gives.
3. Jesus corrected the tense that the Jews used: they said that it was Moses who “gave” (past tense), but that the Father “gives” (present tense).
4. The bread that God gives is that which comes from heaven.
5. That bread gives life to the world.

Happily, the crowd responded the way the Samaritan woman responded to Jesus at Jacob's well in John 4: 15 (“Sir, give me this water”). The crowd responded: *“Lord, give us this bread always”* (verse 34). Both responses sounded as if they were asking Jesus for a spiritual gift. Jesus said to them, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”* (verse 35). The crowd failed to understand when Jesus spoke of “the bread

of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world” (verse 33). Obviously, such responses were only at the level of the stomach.

At this point, brothers and sisters, please allow me to point out to you the series of “I AM” sayings in John’s Gospel that remind us of the burning bush story. When Moses asked GOD, His Name, God replied, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you’ ” (Exodus 3:14). This dynamic GOD, who is ALL POWERFUL is represented by Jesus now:

1. I AM HE (4:26)
2. I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE (6:35).
3. I AM THE LIVING BREAD (6:51).
4. WHEN YOU LIFT UP THE SON OF MAN, THEN YOU WILL REALIZE THAT, I AM, AND THAT I DO NOTHING ON MY OWN (8:28).
5. BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM (8:58).
6. I AM THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP (10:7).
7. I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (10:11).
8. I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE (11:25).
9. I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE (14:6).
10. I AM THE TRUE VINE (15:1).

In their forty-year journey through the wilderness, God fed the Israelites with manna—teaching them to rely on God for their sustenance. The deeper lesson was “that man does not live by bread only, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Brothers and sisters, now Jesus makes a similar claim for Himself. He will provide for our deepest needs because we believe in Him. Amen