

18TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME—Bread of Life

“Who ever comes to me will never hunger whoever believes in me will not thirst.” This Sunday, let’s rejoice because of the great nourishment that God gives us through Jesus Christ, the nourishment that sustains us, and shapes us. The nourishment from the one who IS the bread from God—the bread of life—Jesus Christ himself. Through the Eucharist he is the source and summit for our Faith and for us as a people who identify ourselves as the very body of Christ. We are so fortunate—We have been given a Divine gift to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

Our scripture readings today point out the difference between physical hunger and spiritual hunger. The Israelites in the OT were doubting God because of their physical hunger, they were feeling abandoned. And who could blame them? They were lost and starving in the desert! Faith is a challenge for anyone when their basic needs aren’t being met. But, despite what the Israelites thought at the time, God came through for them. Providing manna for them to eat, to sustain them in their time of trial.

In our second reading, Paul pleads with his readers to move away from their old selves and stop living in the futility of their minds. He urges them to put on a new self, be transformed toward a life lived in the spirit of Christ, in unity with him.

With every Eucharist we receive, we can experience a spiritual revolution like the one Paul talks about, but it is not going to happen if we look at our sacrament of Communion with our everyday analytical minds. This is about understanding Jesus's teaching with the heart, understanding, being open, and actually grasping each Eucharist as an opportunity to connect with Jesus.

Each Eucharist we experience. Or, I like the word **undergo**. During every Eucharist, we **undergo an encounter with Jesus**, and by that I mean we are influenced by him—as someone, who **works** on us—someone who changes us for the good, for our good, he can redeem us,

he can refresh us, he can direct us, he gives us wisdom, he forgives us and feeds us, and always draws us further into this relationship with Him.

In the gospel, the people following Jesus are really not getting what he is trying to say to them, they are confusing this amazing miracle around food with the primary miracle which is The miracle of being in the presence of Jesus. This huge crowd has become kind of carried away with what they just witnessed, and who wouldn't be? They are fascinated by the fact that they witnessed all this bread and fish that was produced out of nowhere, and they are hungering for the next thing.... They like being fed without having to catch the fish. They like being fed without having to grow the grain and make the bread.

Also they seem to need the next sign to prove to themselves that Jesus is the Messiah—rather than accepting Jesus and his teaching in the first place. They are allowing their physical needs to overshadow their spiritual needs. They are looking for more signs but are failing to recognize

the true purpose of Christ's coming to earth – He is their spiritual Bread of Life and he is there with them.

This passage in the Gospel of John, and our gospel readings for the next few weeks are called the bread of life discourses or teachings. This is where Jesus presents his followers with a difficult teaching, but a brilliant one. Take very common and sustaining food and connect yourself to God through it. Take some simple elements, from the earth and human hands, like bread and wine, and let it serve as spiritual food for the journey. Jesus didn't say "think about this, argue about this, or prove this," instead he says, "Take this and eat it, and drink this....all of you." And I will be there, I will be there for you.

300 years later St. Augustin would preach the same message in a similar way, he said simply "you are what you eat."

So maybe the most amazing thing about our sacrament of the Eucharist is not so much the changing of the bread and wine, it's about the changing of us. It's about the changing of the people receiving it.

Every encounter with Christ is life changing, how could it not be? Even if it's only an incremental change, it still changes us, if we are open to it, if we allow ourselves to be present to it.

The Franciscan writer Fr Richard Rohr says it this way. “

“The Eucharist is an encounter of the heart, knowing [divine] Presence through our available presence. In the Eucharist, we move beyond mere words or rational thought and go to that place where we don't talk about the Mystery; we begin to chew on it. (he continues) We must move our knowing to the bodily, cellular, participative, and unitive level. Then we keep eating and drinking the Mystery until one day it dawns on us, in an undefended moment, “My God, I really am what I eat!” Henceforth we can trust and allow what has been true since the first moment of our existence: We *are* the very Body of Christ.”

AMEN

