

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Exodus 16:2-4,12-15

This reading takes us back in time to the period of the Exodus after the Israelites had left Egypt and before they arrived at Mount Sinai. The events recounted here take place in the Wilderness of Sin, an area just to the northwest of Mount Sinai. During their journey, God puts the Israelites to three tests to see if they will obey Him:

- 1) Marah (Exodus 15:22-27). Three days travel from the Red (Reed) Sea and no water had been found until they came to the waters of Marah (the name means “bitter”). Because the water is undrinkable, the people grumble to Moses who takes it up with God who shows him a piece of wood. When Moses throws the wood into the water, the water becomes sweet.
- 2) Manna & Quail (Exodus 16:1-36). This event occurs two and one-half months after leaving Egypt. This is what we will study today.
- 3) Water (Exodus 17:1-7). Now, instead of bitter water, they have no water at all. The people again protest to Moses and demand water, comparing their discomfort with the comfort they had enjoyed in Egypt. Moses talks with God, strikes the rock with his staff (the same one used to impress Pharaoh & part the sea) and water flows forth.

² Here in the desert the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

The people complain against Moses and Aaron, but their ultimate complaint is against God. In Egypt, although slaves, they had plenty to eat. Pharaoh had provided for them in abundance and now they are starving.

³ The Israelites said to them, “Would that we had died at the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!” ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not. ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God.” ¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp.

The quail don’t figure prominently in this story, manna is the primary focus but Numbers 11 tells us the quail was provided because the people were dissatisfied with the manna.

Psalm 78:17-31 tells us that the quail turned out to be poisonous, killing those who had craved them. The commentaries, in an effort to explain the miracle, tell us that quail fly south annually from their northern European and Scandinavian quarters in September and October to winter in Africa. In May and June they make the return trip. The migration usually follows the wind, but if the wind suddenly shifts, the entire flock may be forced to land where, because they are exhausted, they are easy to catch. This explanation doesn't tell us how they appeared daily for 40 years instead of just during the migration – a miracle has occurred.

In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, ¹⁴ and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. ¹⁵ On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

Again, the commentaries, in an effort to explain away the miracles, tell us that the manna is the honey-like droppings from the tamarisk tree. These droppings are secretions from two kinds of scale lice, which suck large quantities of liquid from the twigs in the spring to collect nitrogen for their grubs. It contains glucose and fructose but no protein. When it drops to the ground it becomes somewhat firm in the cool night air. It has a low melting point (~70°F) and thus must be gathered early before the sun causes it to melt. Today, Bedouins consider it a delicacy because of its sweet taste. Again, this does not explain the miracle as it occurred daily (except on the Sabbath, as a double portion was provided on Friday) for 40 years; not just in the spring. Also, this sustained about 1 million Israelites for 40 years. Another miracle has occurred. The responsorial psalm for today (Psalm 78) is about manna.

2nd Reading - Ephesians 4:17,20-24

Last week (17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B) we heard Saint Paul's call to unity. This week we hear him speak about interior renewal. Every Christian needs to lead a new life in Christ in order to contribute to the growth of the Body. This means one must shed the life of vanity and sin which one led before one's conversion and put on Christ, the new Man.

¹⁷ So I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

This is the common Jewish view of pagans, they were empty-headed (Romans 1:21-23). The emptiness of their minds had led them away from God, the source of all truth. If the mind operates in a vacuum, the resulting knowledge produces nothing but illusion and deceit.

"Consider what Paul calls 'futility of mind.' This occurs when someone has a mind but does

not use it for contemplation, instead surrendering it to captivity under Satan” [Origin (ca. A.D. 240), *Commentaries On The Psalms*, 118.37].

²⁰ That is not how you learned Christ, ²¹ assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, ²² that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires,

The type of life they led when equipped only with the resources belonging to human nature as sons of Adam. Human weakness prompted countless moral failures that caused spiritual death (Colossians 3:9, Romans 8:13, Galatians 6:8).

²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.

In verses 22-24 we are told to “put away the old self” and to “put on the new self.” These words belong to a baptismal liturgy. The candidate removed his old clothes, went into the baptismal water, then put on new white clothing upon emerging; outward signs of an inner change: He had put aside his former life, washed away his sin, and put on Christ, beginning a new manner of life.

“When one is already clothed, how is it said that one must further ‘put on’ a new nature? New clothing was once put on in baptism. The new clothing now being put on is the new way of life and conduct that flows from baptism. There one is no longer clothed by deceitful desires but by God’s own righteousness” [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 392-397), *Homilies On The Epistle To The Ephesians*, 13,4,24].

The “new self” is incorporation into Christ Himself, the new Adam, becoming what God had intended when God created him in His own image (Romans 6:3-11).

Gospel - John 6:24-35

We now proceed on through John’s Gospel from the feeding of the 5,000 (which we heard last week); skipping over the account of His walking on water, to His discourse on the Bread of Life. If we had continued on with our studies in the Gospel of Mark (our Cycle B Gospel) instead of taking a detour the scenic route) through John, after recounting His walking on water, we would have heard of Jesus healing more sick and casting out more demons than the feeding of the 4,000 before we came to this point. In time we are one year prior to Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. There are three Passover periods mentioned in Holy Scripture; all of which appear in the Gospel of John:

- 1) John 2:13-12 – The cleansing of the temple immediately after the marriage feast at Cana.
- 2) John 6:4 – The feeding of the 5,000 which, along with Jesus’ walking on water, immediately precede this bread of life discourse.

3) John 11:55 – Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection.

24 When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

Capernaum is a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The place known to be Jesus’ center of activity in Galilee. Matthew 4:13 notes that He established a residence there. He began His public ministry there by teaching in the synagogue (Mark 1:21 & Luke 4:31). Since Jesus had fled to the mountain alone (last week, last verse) and the crowd knew that He had not departed with the Apostles (John 6:16), they looked for Him where they knew He maintained a home base.

25 And when they found him across the sea they said to him, “Rabbi,

In the New Testament, the term “Rabbi” is used as a form of address rather than a title (such as “The Rabbi”). The term means “master” and was the way a student of the scribes would address his teacher. The use of this address to Jesus is significant because, even though they don’t know precisely who He is, or what His mission is, they do recognize Him as a religious leader. Recall though that Jesus had fled after the feeding of the five thousand because He realized they wanted to make Him king.

when did you get here?”

They are curious about Him. Jesus doesn’t answer their question. Rather than reveal another miracle to them (such as His walking on water to get there), which would have reinforced their being impressed by physical (material/bodily) things, He steers their attention to His true mission which is spiritual.

26 Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you,

In Hebrew, Greek and Latin the words are the same: “Amen, amen”. We normally end our prayers with “amen” but Jesus begins His statement in this manner. Amen means “truly”, “so be it”, “I do believe”. The doubled Amen is a solemn affirmation, an oath. When swearing an oath, the response was “Amen”. The faithful and true witness is Christ, the Amen (Revelation 3:14). Since two witnesses are required to sentence someone to death (Deuteronomy 17:6), Jesus is bearing the part of both witnesses and alerting them that what He is going to say has life and death consequences.

you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

They have not understood the true meaning of the signs but instead are now looking for a handout – free food (things of the body).

27 Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life,

Material food keeps us alive in this world, spiritual food sustains and develops supernatural life which will last forever; recall that the woman at the well in John 4:1-26 was promised living water and that she would never thirst. This spiritual food, only God can give us. Through God's infinite love we are given, in the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus Himself as nourishment for our souls.

which the Son of Man will give you.

Jesus' favorite designation of Himself; a title which is never applied to him by the evangelists. This image draws upon Daniel 7:13-14; 8:17 where the son of man is prefigured as the messiah who is to usher in the final days, and also Genesis 2:7, the creation account, where in Hebrew *adam* means man and *adama (adamah)* means earth. Jesus is the new Adam, the one who doesn't fall. The image may also reflect back to Ezekiel 37 where God addresses the prophet Ezekiel as "son of man" and uses him to preach to the dry bones which fill a valley and effect a resurrection (this is the inspirational source of the spiritual song "Dem Bones"). The Jews knew their Scriptures very well and would easily make the association between the title He gives Himself and the promises of a messiah, a prophet, and resurrection which are made in these passages. Jesus' use of the term "Son of man" is a certain indication to his hearers that He claims to have been sent by God.

For on him the Father, God, has set his seal."

Given firm and eternal authority (Nehemiah 9:38, Song of Songs 8:6). When a seal is impressed on wax, the wax receives the complete form of the seal. So it is that the Son received the entire form of the Father (Hebrews 1:3).

28 So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?"

Jesus has said that they are to work for food which doesn't perish. Moses gave food but it would perish, now Jesus promises food which remains forever, it is obviously the work of God. How are they to do this?

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent."

They can't do God's work; their task is to believe in Him, and consequently in what He says, in faith (not because of the miracles He does but because of Who sent Him). He who comes from God speaks the words of God (John 3:31-34).

30 So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?"

Again, they misunderstand Him. They think they are being asked to “put faith” in Jesus in order to credit something He is about to say. They then proceed to prove how material-minded they are. Their enthusiasm over the feeding of the five thousand is already beginning to wane. That was a short-lived sign. They are hungry again. They want more free food for the stomach, they have not discerned that He is promising spiritual food.

31 Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Now the dialog between the crowd and Jesus is beginning to sound even more like the one with the woman at the well: She had asked if He was greater than Jacob (John 4:12) and here the people want to know if He can compare with Moses (Exodus 16:15). Moses gave food but it would perish, now Jesus promises food which remains forever.

32 So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven;

With a doubled *amen* Jesus reminds them that it was God, not Moses, who provided the manna.

my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

By using the term “my Father” He calls Himself the Son of God. He also reminds them that this promised gift is also from God the Father. Note the transition from past tense to present tense “Moses gave - my Father gives”.

33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

God’s bread is not food but life to the world. This shifts emphasis from the “bread from heaven” to the “bread of God”.

34 So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread

Still misunderstanding Him, they echo the words of the woman at the well in John 4:15. Although they now have a perception that He is speaking of non-material bread, and that He can give this bread, they do not yet understand that this bread is Himself.

always.”

They are requesting a continual (lifetime) supply of bodily food. This causes Jesus’ response in the next verse.

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread

Jesus specifically identifies Himself with the bread of which he is speaking.

of life;

Like the “water of life” (John 4:10) it satisfies forever. Shifts emphasis from “bread of God” to “bread of life”; the gift of God is everlasting life. The bread of God gives life to the world (verse 33).

whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

Here Jesus equates coming to Him to believing in Him. It is through faith that we approach our Lord. Jesus also uses the analogy of food and drink to show that He is the one who really meets all of man’s noblest aspirations and meets all of man’s needs.

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