

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 4 August 2024 + Ex 16:2-4, 12-15 + Jn 6:24-35

As we continue to work our way through John chapter 6, recall how last week Jesus miraculously multiplies 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish so as to feed 5,000 men, with 12 baskets of bread being left over. By doing so, he revealed himself to be the true Prophet, the Messiah, the one who is gathering the scattered 12 tribes of Israel. Even more, we saw how this miracle looks back to the miracle of the manna in the desert in the Old Testament, as well as looks forward to the Last Supper and institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Not surprisingly, after this miracle, the people want to make Him their king. But being an earthly king is not God's will, so Jesus disappears. So the crowds go out in search of Him, and that is where our Gospel picks up today. Jesus begins by making a slight rebuke to the people: they are only really looking for Him because they were hungry, and He miraculously fed them. There is nothing really wrong with this; after all, feeding the hungry is a corporal work of mercy. But Jesus fed them not only to fill their stomachs. Rather, He did it to lead them to understand a deeper need: the need to know God. And so He instructs them, *Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*

So what exactly does this mean? *How do we work for food that endures for eternal life?* Well, Jesus responds, telling them that all they have to do, to do God's work, is to *believe in the one he sent*. They have to *believe* in Him. There is our solution. It's really not that difficult, in theory, at least. But in reality, belief is hard. So, the people want a sign from heaven. Just like scientifically minded people today, they want *proof*. And so the people ask Jesus for proof that He is the one sent by God. In fact, they offer Him a sort of challenge.

Basically, their challenge went like this: they remind Jesus that Moses too was a prophet sent by God. As we hear in our 1st reading today from the Book of Exodus, when Moses prayed, *He gave them bread from heaven to eat*. So what can Jesus do, the people want to know, if He too is sent by God? Can he 'one-up' Moses' sign? Well, Jesus' answer here is brief and profound: the people are mistaken. *Moses* did not feed their ancestors in the desert; rather, *God Himself* fed the people in the desert. And the sign that Jesus gives them for proof is not more manna from heaven; rather, it is *His own self*. He says, *I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst*. In other words, He will feed them with Himself, and they will never hunger again.

So, are the people satisfied with this proof? Well, as we will see over the next few weeks, most of them are not. From the time of the Israelites in our 1st reading today, to the time of Christ in our Gospel, and sadly, even today, we know that many people have tested God in the wilderness of their lives and apparently, found Him lacking. They are always looking for more, and yet never satisfied.

So why is that? Is Jesus a liar? Well, no, of course He isn't. But still, why do so many people, especially these days, walk away from Him, looking for fulfillment beyond Him? Well, to answer this, let's look more closely at His claims. First, He says, *whoever comes to me will never hunger*. Here we might ask, how many people really *come to Jesus*? Because it's one thing to know *about* somebody. It's a whole other thing to actually *know* them. If all Catholicism is to a person is information, often seen as a set of restrictive, and these days countercultural rules, with no living relationship, it is not surprising that a person walks away when things get tough.

And that leads us to the second claim of Jesus: *whoever believes in me will never thirst*. I wonder sometimes, how many people are ever invited to make a true, life-changing act of faith in Jesus as Lord? And we should ask, how deep is my faith? Have I ever made a step forward in faith and so allowed Jesus to show His power to me, or do I always hedge my bets, stay in control, and never allow my faith to go beyond myself and reach out to God?

I'd like to offer here a powerful, true testimony from a person I worked at the diocese with, about how her family came to see God prove Himself and make good on His promises, after she responded to His call to come to Him and believe in Him. It was early spring of 2020. She had recently left a good paying job in the corporate world to work in Church ministry. Then her husband was laid off due to covid shutdowns.

She writes: *We needed propane to heat the house. It was going to cost \$632 and we didn't have it. Sitting before the budget with no money left for heat we wondered if ministry was really what God wanted...I left for work that day with no money and no propane. I cried a little. At Mass that day I simply said "Jesus, I trust in you." When I got home that night, I opened the mailbox. Inside was a letter from the Social Security Office that included a check. The check was for \$632. I didn't know that we were owed money. God had provided. I cried a lot.*

If you want Jesus to prove to you that He truly can be the fulfillment of all your desires, you have to give Him a chance. He says: *Come to Me*—talk to Me in prayer. *Believe in Me*—make a radical act of trust in Me. He has come from Heaven to give us life! And He promises that those who feed upon Him in faith will never hunger nor thirst. We will likely still struggle in life, but through it all, we will know, deep down, that He is enough.