

Homily for the 18th Sunday of the Year

One way of coping with the challenging present is to look backwards to the past, when everything was supposedly so much better, which is what is happening in our first reading today. The people are being led by Moses towards the promised land after they had escaped from Egypt by God's intervention. It is not an easy journey and our reading opened with them complaining and yearning for the past 'when we could sit down and eat pans of meat and could eat bread to our hearts content.' What is missing is that this was within the context of being slaves, their memory is selective, as ours can be, when we remember only what we want rather than the whole picture. Missing from our passage is Moses' pleading with God to do something to stop the complaints, so God responds by providing Manna, bread from heaven, or as the last sentence of the reading told us, 'the bread the Lord has given you to eat.' Again missing from our passage is the promise that there will be sufficient for everyone, no-one will have too much and no-one will have too little, another thing for us to ponder in a world where the divide between the rich and the poor seems to be growing all the time, and the amount of wasted food in our own country is a national disgrace.

This is the background to the gospel passage where Jesus pulls no punches telling the people that he knows that the only reason they have sought him out is because they see him as a food ticket. By feeding the 5,000 with the food of the poor, five barley loaves and two fish, Jesus knew what their reaction would be, but he wants them to go deeper. 'Do not work for the food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life.' To which they ask, 'What must we do?' Jesus replies, 'Believe in the one God has sent.' This is an absolutely crucial statement in the whole of John 6. Jesus is telling them to believe in him, the bread of life who feeds our hunger and slakes our thirst. The emphasis last week was on feeding, this week it is believing.

This faith in Jesus will help us to give up our old way of life and, in St Paul's words in today's 2nd reading, 'put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of truth.' In other words our faith in Jesus the Bread of Life will inspire us into action. This may involve, in the words of Richard Forster a Christian in the Quaker tradition, living more simply by: "buying things for their usefulness rather than status; rejecting anything that might produce an addiction; developing a habit of giving things away; learning to enjoy things without owning them; developing a deeper appreciation of creation; obeying Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech; acting with integrity; rejecting anything that breeds the oppression of others; shunning those things that distract us from seeking first the kingdom of God." This is one way of living our faith in Jesus, the one sent by God. It is also about leaving the sacred space of this church, nourished by what we have heard and received, and entering the sacred space of the world, appreciating it as God's creation, and, as agents of change bringing about, even in some small way, transformation for the better, which will give real hope to many less fortunate than ourselves.

Bidding Prayers for the 18th Sunday

Celebrant:

God heard the cries of the people in the wilderness and sent them manna from heaven. With confidence we pray now to the same God asking for some of our many needs.

Reader:

For the Church – that it will be a beacon of hope guiding people to the fullness of life in Christ.

Lord in your mercy

For those living in poverty without adequate food or drink – that the rich nations of the world will share their plenty with those who have nothing.

Lord in your mercy

For those who find themselves constantly looking to the past and find it difficult to live in the present and face the future with hope – that the Lord will help them and us to trust in him each day.

Lord in your mercy

For those whose lives have been turned upside down by illness or accident – that they will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, especially all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters or the Covid-19 pandemic, and Eva Howarth, William Lally, Brian Quinn, Terence Green, Brian Keaveney, Eileen Godfrey, David Burke and John Carr whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord hear us

Either aloud or in the silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord have mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary our mother as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God you gave us your Son as the true bread sent from heaven that satisfies our hunger and makes us thirst for you. May we always be grateful for this most precious gift. Send us into the world as heralds of the Gospel working for the good of all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen