

Good morning everyone.

There are several important issues concerning our life of faith in this Sunday's readings (Ninth Sunday after Trinity). We are prompted to consider what our faith in God really means. Why are we looking for God, and for Jesus who shows us what God is like? Is it merely for the things we hope he may give us – health, wealth, happiness (whatever that means)? We all need to service our physical needs; we all need our share of material supports. But what about our spiritual needs and growth? Do we look diligently for Jesus for himself, for what he means for our lives? It is he who makes our life meaningful and teaches us how we can keep growing as his brothers and sisters. And he also asks us to learn from him to give of ourselves to others, to become each other's 'food and drink' to enable them to live and thrive.

Exodus 16: 2 – 4 & 9 – 15

The story of God feeding the ancient Israelites in the wilderness with manna, or bread from heaven, is referred to several times in the New Testament, and has special focus in today's Gospel reading. Naturally, in the Gospel as elsewhere the physical bread is seen as a symbol or precursor of the true bread from heaven, the spiritual bread in the person of Jesus himself. However, we should not overlook the provision of physical food as an important part of God's concern and involvement with humanity. That was also a huge part of the meaning of the feeding of the multitude by Jesus which we read last Sunday. The provision of manna is a justice issue. Under the leadership of Moses, God has just liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Ensuring that they have sufficient food for their long journey and sojourn in the wilderness would ensure their survival and would (or should) also make it clear that God loved them. Our life in Christ calls us to share and express God's love for the world. It must always include compassion for those who hunger, whether for food or other physical needs, and a longing that all should have enough resources for life to be lived rather than suffered or endured.

Ephesians 4: 1 - 16

How the new life in Christ will be lived out is the focus of our second reading. It is about our Christian formation not just as individuals but as part of the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts and graces that Christ gives to each one of us are to help shape our Christian community life, and our individual relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. So we are urged to live lives that are worthy of our calling. We are to bear with one another in love; we are to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are to speak the truth in love. All this leads to maturity in our life of faith. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ himself.

John 6: 24 – 35

We continue reading from the 'bread of life' discourse in John 6. Jesus has just fed more than 5,000 hungry people, initially with a very limited supply of food. The people were very happy about that. But they wanted more. Their faith was clearly distorted. They searched for Jesus because he had satisfied their material needs. Jesus tells it to them straight, 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.'

The people that Jesus fed now demand another *sign* so that they will believe. Yet they have already seen and still do not believe! Are we tempted to look for 'proofs' when the presence and power of God is daily right in front our eyes and within ourselves?

As we considered last week, the story of the feeding of the multitude and the discourse which follows about Jesus as the Bread of Life, is John's reflection on the meaning of Eucharist, the Christian Passover. St Augustine observed that when we eat earthly food, it is absorbed into our earthly bodies. In contrast, when we receive the Eucharist, we are drawn into Christ's body. Through this sacrament, we live in him, and he lives in us.

The Eucharist, then, is the guarantee of the presence of the risen Lord. And our frequent participation in it is our practical acceptance of this reality and it is the most important expression of our faith in Jesus. Faith means not just a belief in the mind but in a heart that inspires practical engagement with the gospel. This is the way we 'get a life' as Christians, true life because Jesus is in it. Like material bread when we are hungry, it is up to us to receive the spiritual bread of the life of Jesus himself, and wholeheartedly continue an amazing adventure to discover where life lived in him will lead us.

A prayer for the day:

Our living and loving God, we hunger for lasting life and happiness and the fulfilment of all our hopes. Give us the courage and faith to know that all our hungers are satisfied through your Son Jesus Christ who is our bread of life. And when he has filled us with himself, may he lead and strengthen us to bring to a waiting world the food of reconciliation, justice, peace, joy, and love which you alone can give to the full. We ask this in his name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wishing you a good Sunday and every blessing for the week ahead.

Love and prayers,

John



