

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity – a liturgy for worship at home

Introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We consider today how God provides food for his people. Can we believe this when so many people in the world are hungry? But it is food that is lacking or is it the distribution and the sharing that is the big problem? As Christians we must always pray and seek justice for those in need. The bread of the Bible represents not only food for the body but also the food of God's word, love, compassion and presence. The most profound sign of God's care is the Eucharist, in which Jesus keeps giving himself as our food and drink for the road of life. Of course, we are aware that many of you joining in this act of worship at home are still unable to worship in person and in community and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. But we offer this service in the hope that it encourages a longing to share once again, when the time is right, in the sacred meal and action that Christ himself has given us. In our worship today let us give thanks to the Father for the great gift of his Son who continues to *communicate* with his people most especially when they are gathered to make Eucharist.

Act of Penitence

Are we hungry enough for God's word and care or have we been cold or indifferent towards it? Let us examine ourselves before the Lord.

Lord Jesus, you had compassion for the crowds who flocked to you and gave them to eat:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you have compassion for us and nourish us with your body and blood:

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, your will is for us too to have compassion on people who are hungry for food and love:

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, continue to nourish us with the living bread of Jesus, and lead us to the banquet of everlasting life. Amen.

Act of Praise

The *Gloria* as follows, or some other hymn of praise:

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Lord God, your Son left the riches of heaven and became poor for our sake: when we prosper save us from pride, when we are needy save us from despair, that we may trust in you alone; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the second book of Kings

(4: 42 – 44)

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

For the word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 145: 10 – 11 & 16 – 19

All your works praise you, O Lord, and your faithful servants bless you.

They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your mighty power.

The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season.

You open wide your hand and fill all things living with plenty.

The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving in all his works.

The Lord is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

(3: 14 – 21)

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

For the word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, alleluia.

Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.

You have the message of eternal life.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

(6: 1 – 15)

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he

looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

For the Gospel of the Lord: Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

There are lots of references to food and drink in the Bible. Hearing such scriptures must have been rather challenging in the days when many more people than now always came to Holy Communion having fasted from food since the previous evening and were no doubt looking forward to breakfast. It's not such a sacrifice really. Most people in Bible times were poor; they were often hungry. So much of life and energy was taken up with simply surviving. Sadly, for many people in the world today, that situation is much the same.

When the Bible writers wanted to describe what heaven was like or give examples of God's generosity and compassion for his people, they didn't need to stretch the imagination far. A place of plentiful food and drink provided the perfect analogy. In the Gospels, Jesus often describes heaven as a banquet to which God generously invites everyone. In today's Gospel we have the beginning of the long chapter 6 from the Gospel of John which provides a sort of food feast excursion during a year in which Mark is the lead Gospel. When it comes to food and drink, John always provides us with a rich spread.

In the reading today, Jesus feeds a large hungry crowd who had been following him around, or looking for him, especially that they might be healed. In this story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which is related in all four Gospels, we cannot know, nor do we need to know what exactly happened. But we do know that the story is about much more than a free feed-up for a crowd of hungry people in a particular time and place. Otherwise, the Gospel writers wouldn't have bothered to record it.

They wrote about it because, typically, it has a meaning for people in every time and place. It tells us something about the difference Jesus makes when we faithfully and resolutely search for him. For the first readers of the Gospels, it recalled the Exodus account of God feeding his people in the wilderness with manna, bread from heaven, in answer to the prayer of Moses, their leader, so that they would be sustained on their journey to the Promised Land. The Gospel story, especially in John, also draws on the account in our first reading of the prophet Elisha feeding a small multitude. And now, here is Jesus, greater than Moses or Elisha. He comes to feed his people, not just with physical food in a wilderness or mountainside, but with the spiritual food of himself in the wilderness of life, to sustain them on their journey to the eternal Promised Land.

In his Gospel, John does not describe the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, that is, not the actual meal with the breaking of bread and giving of wine. Rather, John focuses on what that meal represents for those who share in it, how it calls them to follow Jesus' example of loving, self-giving service, which he demonstrates by stooping down to wash the disciples' feet. Instead, John uses the story of the loaves and fish and what follows to anticipate the sacrificial death of Jesus. The mention that it is Passover time is deliberate, and the words and actions of Jesus over the food are triggers to remind us of the Last Supper: 'he took the bread, he gave thanks, he gave it to them.'

This story is especially about the Christian Eucharist, what we are doing now and continually. Here, as we do this, our Gospel story is mimed, re-enacted. The love, the compassion, the generosity of God through Jesus, his very life itself is made present to us to feed on, for us to be nourished and strengthened by him until we come to share fully with him in God's banquet of eternal life.

But Eucharist is not simply about sharing in a ritual, a church service. In the service we use bread and wine as Jesus did. It reminds us just how 'earthed' God became and remains for us. The focus of the Eucharist is that we

recognise the presence of the risen Christ in these things of the earth, and that in sharing them we may individually and together be more and more shaped or moulded into Christ's likeness. The purpose of the Eucharist, as St Augustine put it, is that 'we become what we eat.'

Right here is the nourishment to help us grow into in something truly wonderful. This food is to enable us to share in the life of Christ so that he who became incarnate on earth can continue to be incarnate, flesh and blood, through us. With him we become the food of eternal life for others.

It is not an easy privilege or undertaking. Maybe we are often not present enough, hungry enough, committed enough to co-operate with the Divine Presence among us. We can say the familiar words and go through the motions, the actions, but fail to let them make a difference to us, perhaps not even expect them to have any effect at all, other than feelings about whether we enjoyed the service or not.

Sometimes we feel fragile and weak and perhaps able to give of ourselves to God only in small ways and small amounts. But remember the five loaves and two fish that were presented to Jesus. A small amount can become a very large amount when we put it into his hands and leave it to him to do it with what he will. If we search and long for him as did those needy people in the Gospel scene, he will not disappoint us.

In our second reading from the letter to the Ephesians, the prayer is that 'Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love,' and that 'we may be filled with the whole fullness of God.' It is in opening our hearts to the indwelling of God in Christ, as individuals and congregations, that we are transformed, made into something new and greater. We become and grow as living sacraments, people who bear the image and express the love of Jesus Christ in the world today.

A few moments of silent reflection are recommended.

The Profession of Faith, either the following or one of the traditional creeds:

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us come now before God our Father and Lord of all to bring him our prayers and petitions for the World, the Church, and ourselves.

Everlasting God, may the worship of your Church throughout the world be attentive and expectant, ready to be set on fire again and again with the outrageous foolishness of loving, without exceptions and without limits.

Lord, in your mercy..... Hear our prayer

Creator God, may all that encourages the people of the world in goodness, honesty and compassion be blessed and grow; may all that encourages self-seeking and cruelty, prejudice and deceit wither and die. May Robert our Bishop and David our Area Bishop be blessed in your service, given strength for the task and wisdom from you to lead our Diocese in Europe. May our church here in Tenerife blossom and grow, reaching out beyond our doors to minister in our communities. Give grace to John and Rosemary and all who willingly give service in your name.

Lord, in your mercy..... Hear our prayer

Father God, in this troubled world we ask for peace and goodwill among the nations.

May all governments be worthy to lead and direct their people; we pray particularly for our governments of Spain and the United Kingdom that they will be wise and just and have the needs of the people at heart. We ask for good judgement in dealing with the pandemic and the opening of borders. We also lift to you those who are fleeing homes and countries to find a safer and better life.

Give grace to the Royal families, may they always stand as good examples of integrity and dignity.

Lord, in your mercy..... Hear our prayer

Father God, we thank you for the joy of human love, and for all those among whom we live and work. We pray particularly for loved ones who worry us

with their health, or circumstances, or life direction. We pray for those among our friends and families who do not know you or find it difficult to believe in a loving God who wants the very best for them, and for those whose faith has been shaken by life's circumstances.

Lord, in your Mercy..... Hear our prayer

We pray for all who suffer mental or emotional anguish and those who despair. We pray for those facing another day of pain, another day of hunger, another day of fear.

Be with them we pray, comfort, heal and protect them and may they know themselves to be loved by you and others. We continue to pray especially for Carol Hart and Fay Briffett.

Lord, in your mercy..... Hear our prayer

Gather into your eternal kingdom, Lord, all who have come to the end of this earthly life and rejoice to see you as you really are. We remember all whom we love but see no longer, and we thank you for your overarching love and faithfulness to us.

Be with the bereaved and broken hearted; may they be comforted and restored.

Lord, in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

Gracious God, giver of every harvest, hear the prayers we offer. May the bread and wine of your Son's Body and Blood make us bread of compassion and kindness, and wine of gladness and hope for one another.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

United in one faith and one baptism, let us pray in the Holy Spirit to God, the Father of all, in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

In union, dear Father, with Christian people throughout the world and across the centuries gathered to make Eucharist, hearing your holy word and receiving the Precious Body and Blood, I offer you praise and thanksgiving.

Even though I am today unable to taste the Bread of Heaven and drink the Cup of Life, I pray that you will unite me with all the baptised and with your Son

who gave his life for us. Come Lord Jesus, dwell in me and send your Holy Spirit that I may be filled with your presence. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

We give you thanks, generous Father, that you have given Jesus, your Son, as our food for the road to you and to one another. Give us the will and the creativity to help bring to a hungry world food and a fair share in the riches of the earth. Help us to break the bread of our own lives to create justice, dignity and hope for all. And may you, dear Father, be the highest fulfilment of all our aspirations, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you, and with all those you love and pray for, today and always. Amen.

Let us go and share God's love and gifts with one another. Thanks be to God.