

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: Last week the miracle of the loaves began the preparation for the bread of life discourse. Today the reading from Exodus about the Manna together with the passage from Psalm 78 prepares us for the beginning of the bread of life discourse of John, chapter 6. The Gospel is interesting because it sets the scene for the discourse, with Jesus understanding the real reason why the crowds are being so persistent, that they were in fact wanting some proof before they believed. Jesus states the theme of the discourse, that he is the sign; he is the bread of life.

The reading from Paul is a piece unto itself, and calls us to simply be recreated, to be made new as disciples of Jesus. The renewal of "the spirit of our minds" is what is called for - an interesting turn of phrase which means, for Paul, that a whole new person is to be born by the power of the Spirit.

The readings for the next several weeks will focus on this bread of life, and the preacher needs to prepare, at least in outline form, how the next several weeks will unfold.

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First Reading Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

I will rain down bread from heaven for you.

A reading from the Book of Exodus

The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 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!"

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.

"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."

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp.
In the morning a dew lay all about the camp,
and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert
were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground.
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 that the LORD has given you to eat."

The word of the Lord

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15 Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: God miraculously feeds his people with a unique BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

It is a critical time in the salvation history of the chosen people of Israel. After being led out of slavery from Egypt by Moses and Aaron in the Exodus event, they are now "grumbling" because they do not have enough food. They even wish to return to slavery in Egypt rather than die of famine in the desert. That is when God, who has heard their "grumbling," intervenes through Moses and promises to send down "bread from heaven" for the Israelites to eat till they are filled. Thus they will know that they have a God able to complete his salvation of them and fulfill their basic needs--"that you may know that I, the Lord, am your God."

This "bread from heaven" is strange and mysterious. It comes down from heaven as dew, which after evaporating left "fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground." The Israelites are bewildered, asking, "What is this?," which in Hebrew is the basis for the term "manna." Moses answers that this is the "bread" the Lord has given them to eat. This mysterious "bread from heaven" foreshadows the "true bread from heaven" God gives in the person of Jesus, "the bread of life" (see today's Gospel reading).

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Second Reading Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Put on the new self that has been created in God's way.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

I declare and testify in the Lord
that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do,
in the futility of their minds;
that is not how you learned Christ,
assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him,
as truth is in Jesus,
that you should put away the old self of your former way of life,
corrupted through deceitful desires,
and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and put on the new self,
created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.

The word of the Lord

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24 Commentary by Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.: In contrast to the futility of their former lives as Gentiles, Christians must become renewed and this formation is expressed in three ways: to learn, listen, be instructed. They have known Christ as one learns a living lesson and, so, his teaching and example have entered within their lives, constituting the rule of truth and truth itself, so profoundly diverse from the teaching and life of the pagans.

The first step within the new life is conversion in its negative aspect: the old nature must be set aside, i.e., that part which is subjected to sin and evil inclination. Hence there must be a renunciation from following false desires so that nature will be entirely renewed by the influence that is contrary to those sinful passions.

The second step is the positive aspect of conversion, the constant renewal within the intimacy of their thoughts, within their heart of hearts, that is already enlivened by the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

The third step is the ongoing transformation of the entire person to appropriate a new nature, initially at Baptism and, then throughout life, because this new being, in opposition to the old person, belongs to the new world into which Christ has introduced us as created in the image and likeness of God. This new life develops within a vital ambiance comprised of virtues: in righteousness and holiness that render the individual an intimate of God himself because these attributes proceed from and are in harmony with Truth.

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Gospel John 6:24-35

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

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

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

And when they found him across the sea they said to him,
"Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered them and said,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,
you are looking for me not because you saw signs
but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

Do not work for food that perishes
but for the food that endures for eternal life,
which the Son of Man will give you.

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

So they said to him,

"What can we do to accomplish the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them,

"This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent."

So they said to him,

"What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?"

What can you do?

Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:

He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

So Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,
it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven;
my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

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

So they said to him,

"Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them,

"I am the bread of life;
whoever comes to me will never hunger,
and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

The Gospel of the Lord

Commentary John 6:24-35 by Tom Conry: This reading is the second in a series of five weeks in which the gospel of Mark (the usual gospel that defines lectionary year B) is interrupted in order to read John 6, which centers on the story of the feeding of the multitude (the only miracle story that is reported in all four canonical gospels), the journey on the lake, and an exegetical speech by Jesus on Exodus 16 (manna in the desert). John 6 is clearly an outside narrative, an originally self-contained story, dropped into the larger Johannine text. In fact, there are indications that the order of chapter 5 and chapter 6 were formerly reversed. Certainly Mark's interpretation of the significance of the feeding of the multitude varies considerably from John's, and whether this prolonged interruption of Mark in the context of the liturgical year is a good idea or a bad one is debatable and debated.

To understand the story, it is critical to understand that barley loaves were considered greatly inferior to wheat, and so were usually doled out only to slaves and people on the bottom of the economic heap. As Philo, writing about the time of Jesus, said, barley was "suited for irrational animals and [people] in unhappy circumstances." The equivalent for us might be collard greens or chitlins, food that is emblematic of a marginalized class of people.

Thus it is not surprising that the crowd is depicted as challenging Jesus in today's reading: "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (6:24) meaning 'you're not from around here, what is your business?' Jesus responds that the crowd has sought him out, not because of their participation in the reign of heaven, but because of a miraculous feeling. The sign of the multiplication of loaves and fishes thus follows the typical Johannine grammar. It is a symbol that either occasions faith or gives offense, depending on one's heart.

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