

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

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."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

R. (24b) **The Lord gave them bread from heaven.**
What we have heard and know,
and what our fathers have declared to us,
We will declare to the generation to come
the glorious deeds of the LORD and his strength
and the wonders that he wrought.
R. **The Lord gave them bread from heaven.**

He commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven;
he rained manna upon them for food
and gave them heavenly bread.
R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

[Man ate the bread of angels,
food he sent them in abundance.](#)

And he brought them to his holy land,
to the mountains his right hand had won.
R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

Reading 2

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

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.

Alleluia

Matthew 4:4b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
One does not live on bread alone,
but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:24-35

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."

Exegesis

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

The setting takes place early in the Exodus experience of the Israelite People. Verse 1 sets the stage as the desert of Sin which is between Elim and Sinai, and the time as the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt. The people are already grumbling against Moses and Aaron. Their current plight of hunger in this deserted place poses the second in a series of tests that God is putting the people through. The first test involved bitter water that the people could not drink in Marah. The test that follows the hunger in the desert of Sin will be the thirst of the people at Rephidim.

The desert is not a place to find food and water. The point is that God is providing for His chosen people on the journey to the Promised Land. God provided quail in the evening and bread, i.e. manna in the morning for the people to eat. It was enough such that everyone was satisfied and miraculously there was enough additional on the sixth day to provide for the Sabbath.

Experts have surmised that the quail may have been *coturnix* a small migratory bird about 7 ½ inches long, brown or sandy with yellowish streaks. It comes to Palestine and Sinai in March, or April in great flocks. It usually follows the wind, but if the wind suddenly shifts, the entire flock may be forced to land, where exhausted, it is easily caught.¹

Manna is the name for the bread from heaven, derived by folk etymology from *man hu*, “What is it?” Again, some biblical experts suggest a natural scientific explanation: “Mana is the honeylike dropping from the tamarisk tree of Palestine and Sinai, which the Bedouin of the Sinai call *mann*. The droppings from the tamarisk are secretions from two kinds of scale lice, which suck large quantities of liquid from the twigs in order to collect nitrogen for their grubs. It contains glucose and fructose but no protein and cannot be harvested in quantity. The Bible portrays manna as miraculous; it is not an everyday occurrence.² I would simply add that God often uses the tools of nature to perform miracles. The miracle was that both the quail and the manna were available over an extended period of time to sustain the people on their journey.

Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

Psalm 78 is entitled *A New Beginning in Zion and David* in some bibles and in others it is entitled *God's Goodness and Israel's Ingratitude*. It is a lengthy song consisting of 72 verses. It provides an historical account of God's goodness from delivery of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the beginning of the reign of King David. Verse two sets the stage, “I will open my mouth in story, drawing lessons from of old.” History proclaims the goodness of the Lord. History also reveals infidelity and ingratitude among the Israelite People. The author is calling on the people to remember or literally not-forget the saving acts of God for which they should remain grateful.

Our pericope today recalls the gift of Manna in the desert. (See above exegesis of Exodus 16 for commentary.) I would like to comment on verse 25, “Man ate the bread of angels, food he sent them in abundance.” This beautiful image also appears in the *Book of Wisdom*, “You nourished Your people with food of angels and furnished them bread from heaven, ready to hand, untoiled-for.” (Wis 16:20) These words inspired St. Thomas Aquinas who wrote, “Behold the bread of the angels, sent for pilgrims in their banishment...” These words taken from the beautiful hymn, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem*, written for the Feast of Corpus Christi, give witness to the fact that the Eucharist has often been referred to as the “bread of angels.”

Exegesis (Continued)

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

The focus of this section of *Ephesians* is *unity in the Spirit*. The paragraph that begins with verse 17 and ends with verse 24 is entitled in most bibles, *Renewal in Christ*. Whereas the author is contrasting Jews versus Gentiles in the community, the lesson can be applied to all of humanity for all of time. “Living in the futility of their minds” reminds us that the gift of human reason only takes us so far. Jesus challenges us to see as God sees and to know as God knows. When reason stalls faith can take over. It is not necessarily a blind leap of faith that follows reason. The Spirit enlightens the mind. It is what Augustine refers to as Divine Illumination.

Verse 21 sums it up by declaring that “truth is in Jesus.” Jesus clearly stated the He is the Truth. Truth, *alethia*, describes ultimate reality, what is real, what always was and endures forever. *Ephesians* is challenging us to a higher level of knowing and of being, which comes from putting on the heart and the mind of Christ. As Paul would express this concept, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20).

John 6:24-35

Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel begins with the miracle of the *Feeding of the Five Thousand*, is followed by the miracle of *Jesus Walking on Water* and continues with the *Bread of Life Discourse* which starts at verse 22. Verse 22 and 23 give us the logistics of Jesus and the crowd.

Some experts claim that the *Bread of Life Discourse* begins with Verse 35 with Jesus proclaiming “I Am the Bread of Life.” Verses 35-47 are referenced as an invitation to faith and verses 48-58 as an invitation to the Eucharist. I have always looked at the entirety of Chapter 6 as the *Bread of Life Discourse*.

As we pick up with verse 24 this weekend it is important to keep in mind the setting. Jesus had just fed the crowd along the western shore of the sea of Tiberias. The following scene finds Jesus walking on water to join his disciples who are traveling north to Capernaum along the northwestern coast. We are told that the crowd followed in boats. Many experts point out that it would have taken quite a flotilla to transport such a crowd. Perhaps the vast majority followed on foot. Maybe the boats are mentioned in that the boat often is symbolic of the Church. Without Jesus in the boat the sea was stormy. With Jesus in the boat, the sea is calmed.

In the first interaction with the crowd Jesus clarifies the distinction between physical sustenance that sustains biological life and Spiritual sustenance that He provides, food for eternal life. Jesus emphasizes the need to believe to possess this life. Herein lies the truth upon which the *Bread of Life Discourse* and in fact all of John’s Gospel is focused. In this conversation it is important to point out that there are two distinct words in Greek that we translate as *life*. One is *bios* which is used to describe physical or biological life. The other word for life is *zoe*. This word appears often in John’s Gospel and is used to describe life in the Spirit, the fullness of life and life eternal.

The heart of the *Bread of Life Discourse* is summed up by Jesus in verse 35. Jesus exclaims, “I AM the Bread of Life.” This is one of several *I AM* statements of Jesus as captured by St. John. *I AM* is *ego eimi* in the original Greek. Those who heard those words from Jesus for the first time would have recognized the claim of Jesus to divinity. They echo the revelation of God in Exodus 3:14, *I AM who I AM*. (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*). As St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out God is revealing Himself as being itself, the one whose very nature is *to be*. In the creation story God breathed His life breath into man and man became a living being. St. John points out in the prologue of His Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word and all things came into being through Him... what came into being through Him was life (*zoe*).” Jesus is revealing to us that He is God and He is the source of all being, all life.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 6:24-35

Bread is the sustenance of life. When Jesus reveals that He is the Bread of Life He is revealing to us that He is also the sustainer of life. Just as the body needs bread for physical nourishment and biological life, so must the soul be nourished and sustained in real life, life in the Spirit. Jesus proclaims that He is the true Bread from heaven. The Greek word for *true* is *alethia*. The English translation does not capture the depth of the word *alethia*. It has a connotation of ultimate reality, i.e. what is really real and immutable. When Jesus proclaims, “I AM the Way and the Truth (*Alethia*) and the Life (*Zoe*),” He is clearly stating that He is God, steadfast and immutable and infinite.

Jesus makes it clear that faith, i.e. belief is necessary to possess eternal life (*zoe*). “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life (*zoe*). In verse 29 Jesus proclaims the importance that “You believe in the one He sent.” The present subjunctive *pisteuete* (“believe”) has a durative meaning. The believing must go on. Among many, see Brown, *Gospel 1:262*.³ As I have pointed out often the idea of faith or belief in scripture at its deepest level means to abide in the indwelling Spirit of God. This is precisely what Jesus is offering to us in the gift of His being; body, blood, soul and divinity in the Holy Eucharist the Bread of Life (*Zoe*). It is a gift that must be received.

1. Brown, Fetzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; N.J.; page 50.

2. Ibid.

3. Moloney, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series; The Gospel of John; L.P.; MN; page 211.

Reflection

This weekend we continue to read from the beautiful *Bread of Life Discourse* in John's Gospel. We are at a point in the dialogue where Jesus is calling us to have faith in His real and substantial presence. The passage includes one of His great I AM statements. Jesus said, "I AM the Bread of Life." Recall that God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as I AM. I AM being itself, the one whose very nature is to be. Therefore, God is the source of all life. And so, Jesus reveals Himself clearly as God, the source of all that is.

I have witnessed to you many times of my deep faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Since the days of my First Communion, I have always believed without question in the Church's teaching on the Eucharist, i.e. that Jesus is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity. Bishop Cousins, while preaching a few years ago at the Steubenville Conference, said that the only time that he doubted even a little in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was about three months prior to his priesthood ordination. When he first started to practice celebrating the Mass he questioned, "How could this be, that my words could change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus?" I can resonate with him as I had a similar experience as I first practiced Mass in the seminary. The bishop went on to say that at his first Mass when he genuflected after the words of consecration, he knew that he was kneeling before the creator of the universe. I also knew at that moment beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was kneeling before Jesus, the eternal Word made flesh, the Bread of Life!

I realized at that moment that it was not my words that I had just spoken. I knew that it was Jesus who was speaking, through me. My faith grew even deeper in that awakening of His presence. When I realized that it was not me, but the creator of the universe, through whom everything came into being that was doing the speaking everything changed. God said, "Let there be..." and everything came into being. So, when Jesus, the Eternal Word made flesh says, "This is My body", the bread becomes His body. When He says, "This is My blood", the wine becomes His blood. Furthermore, His Words command us, "Do this in memory of Me." At His words and His command, the bread and wine are transformed in an instant into the His Body and Blood, and He is fully present, body, blood, soul and divinity!

How did the apostles and the early Church fathers understand the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist? St. Justin Martyr, in the early second century as he was describing in some detail the celebration of the Mass writes:

We do not receive these as common bread and drink. For Jesus Christ our Savior, made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation. Likewise, the food blessed by the prayer of His word – and from which our own blood and flesh are nourished and changed – is the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.

The apostles and the early Church fathers had no doubt as to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Do we realize and truly appreciate the gift that we are given? Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

There was a time in my life, in my late twenties, that I experienced a deep pain and hunger that I never want to experience again. Fresh out of college I began my career as a Certified Public Accountant. I was hungry to prove myself and to make my mark on the world. I quickly became what many refer to as a workaholic. It was akin to drinking salt water; the more that I drank, the thirstier that I became. The more that I worked the more detached and isolated I became. A deep emptiness set in. As the world would judge, I was very successful. One day I came to my senses and realized that if this is success, I don't want it.

It was the untimely death of one of my best friends that jarred me out of the darkness that enveloped me. I turned to God for the first time in many years. I began to rekindle relationships that I had neglected while being immersed in my work. It was the Godly relationships that I formed in my parish community that became my real salvation. I had become spiritually dead. For the first time in many years, I was able to connect again with God and others on a spiritual level. What I had been experiencing I now realize was spiritual poverty, spiritual starvation.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta spoke powerfully of spiritual poverty during a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. in 1994. She said:

“I can never forget the experience I had in visiting a home where they kept all these old parents of sons and daughters who had just put them into an institution and forgotten them – maybe. I saw that in that home these old people had everything – good food, comfortable place, television, everything, but everyone was looking toward the door. And I did not see a single one with a smile on the face. I turned to Sister and I asked: “Why do these people who have every comfort here, why are they all looking toward the door? Why are they not smiling?” I am so used to seeing the smiles on our people, even the dying ones' smile. And Sister said: ‘This is the way it is nearly every day. They are expecting, they are hoping that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They are hurt because they are forgotten.’ And see, this neglect to love brings spiritual poverty ... When I pick up a person from the street, hungry, I give him a plate of rice, a piece of bread. But a person who is shut out, who feels unwanted, unloved, terrified, the person who has been thrown out of society – that spiritual poverty is much harder to overcome.”

“There's two kinds of poverty. We have the poverty of material; for example, in some places like in India, Ethiopia and other places, where the people are hungry for a loaf of bread – real hunger. But there is a much deeper, much greater hunger; and that is the hunger for love, and that terrible loneliness and being unwanted, unloved – being abandoned by everybody.”

As I reflect on my life 35 years ago, it was I who did the abandoning. But it created a deep hunger for love just the same. The loneliness was just as deep. I see that deep loneliness and hunger for love in our country today. I see deep sadness and despair. I see the same anger and vitriol that we all see in our communities or watching the evening news. There is a deep spiritual poverty in our country and in our world. Sadly, there is no simple solution to this deep-seated problem. How do we feed the emptiness and the deep hunger within the human soul?

It would be easy to look at this daunting problem and ask, “what can I do?” Or we could take a little advice from St. Theresa of Calcutta who once said, “Maybe you cannot feed 100 people, but you can feed one.” If each one of us opened our hearts to being fed spiritually by Jesus, the Bread of Life, and then fed the person closest to us, we could spark a spiritual revival in our world. It only takes one small spark to ignite a raging wildfire. Love works the same way! Let it begin with you and with me. Let the fire fall!

F. Glenn