

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

In the Gospel today, Jesus is speaking about the Bread of Life. Now, most of the time, when we talk about this, we tend to focus on the “bread” portion of what Jesus is saying. Food is a good analogy, and an easy one for people to understand. But it’s not just simply bread that Jesus is offering; it is the Bread of “Life”. So I want to focus on the “Life” portion of that, because it’s of ultimate importance.

It is not a physical life that Jesus is giving us here. We all know about superfoods and nutritional supplements so very available to prolong physical life. But people receive the Eucharist, the Bread of Life here at Mass every Sunday, and yet people continue to die every day.

The life that Jesus is speaking about here is our spiritual life. Which, I believe is more real than our physical life. Our spiritual life was given to us at baptism – a very real and concrete event in our lives. It’s a life that is sometimes hidden, but which is much bigger and more important than we realize. It’s the kind of life that remains even after the earthly life goes away. Our bodily life needs food to nourish it, and in turn, so does our spiritual life.

But the Bread that Jesus gives us comes with a huge challenge. With earthly bread, the biggest challenge we receive is how much we have to exercise in order to keep those cupcakes off of our waistline. The Bread of Life, on the other hand, comes with a commitment to live a new life in Christ. When we receive Communion, we become like little tabernacles containing the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ and His most Holy Spirit. And so when we receive that Bread of Life, we’re bound by the presence within us to live that Divine Life in a way that gives evidence to the world that it’s ***there!***

St. Paul talks about this in the second reading today: “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.” This is not optional. It is not just a Sunday thing. It’s not just a sometimes affair. When we receive the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, we are *bound* to Christ.

Some people in the world would tell us that we take this too seriously. They'd say that the most important thing in life is to *feel* like a "good person," regardless of whether the decisions we make jibe with the Divine Life that we've taken upon ourselves in receiving the Bread of Life. This notion of life is not based on faith or on what God or the Church calls us to, but rather on what is quick and easy, what is pleasurable, what is comfortable for us.

So in a sense, there's a part of us that is not hungry for the Bread of Life. It's the part that longs for the passing pleasure of the fleshpots in Egypt like the Israelites in the first reading, even though we know that the price of that pleasure is a life of slavery. It is the part of us that sees the Life that God calls us to as too challenging, too rigorous, too difficult. It is the part of us that goes to Mass on Sunday morning, but then thinks it's perfectly fine to get drunk on Friday night, or trash talk a coworker on Monday afternoon, or actively support political or social stances that are contrary to our faith on Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday.

It is a small part of us that is hungry, yes, but which does not want to be fed with the Bread of Life. And to be honest, that's kind of scary. It's scary that within ourselves, there is just a small part of us that rejects the Bread of Life, the food which Jesus himself promises *will bring us eternal joy and happiness*, and we say, "No, that's ok. I'm fine."

But hopefully the larger and more dominant part of our lives is that part that hungers and thirsts, that longs for, and that pines after that Bread that will last forever. That part of us that can never get enough of God. It's that part of us that after having experienced other foods and other nourishment would much rather have God. It is that part of us that wants to hold the Life of God within our hearts like living tabernacles – waking with it in the morning, sharing our joys and sufferings with it throughout the day, and resting in it again at the end of it all. It is that part of us that, despite our limitations and our sinfulness, wants to give the life that Christ demands of us *everything we've got*. It is that part of us that cries out with Jesus' followers in the Gospel, "Lord, give us this bread always!" Amen.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella