

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time “What Do You Hunger For Most?”

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My friends, every three years the Church takes a break from the Gospel of St. Mark and launches into the Bread of Life discourse in the Gospel of John chapter 6. There is no better theological treatment on the Eucharist in the Gospels than what we find in this chapter so, if you have not done so yet, it would be worthwhile to sit down and prayerfully read through this chapter this coming week. We are in the second of the five Sundays dedicated to this chapter. To bring us up to speed, last week we kicked things off by recalling the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Jesus “takes, breaks and gives” five barley loaves and a couple of fish and feeds the five thousand present. What happened after Jesus performed this profound sign of divine love? It says, the people were so amazed they wanted to carry Jesus off and make him king. Jesus, knowing their hearts, flees. Why? The people didn’t get it! And that is where the Gospel story begins today.

You have to understand that the people in Jesus’ day wanted a savior. But not in the way God was going to deliver. The people wanted a new King David, a political messiah, someone who would liberate Israel from the Romans. God, however, was not going to answer that prayer. Jesus does not want to be our political savior. Jesus wants to be our spiritual savior. The tyranny Jesus wants to liberate us from is not the Romans or any earthly power but our spiritual slavery to sin and death. So instead of sitting on the earthly throne the people were beginning to construct for him, Jesus goes back to his little house in Capernaum across the Sea of Galilee. And so, once more, the people follow Jesus across the Sea and the question we need to consider is the same as last weekend: What are we hungry for?

My friends, what do you hunger for the most in life? I asked myself that question when I was in college figuring out what God wanted me to do with my life. I asked myself, what do I hunger most for? Looking at the classes I found myself signing up for, psychology, philosophy, comparative religion, and looking at how I spent most of my free time at the Catholic Newman Center, the answer I came up for myself was: I hunger for God more than anything this world has to offer. It is why I ended up going to seminary. It is why I am in my twentieth year as a Catholic priest. I see my job as a priest to help people identify the hunger we all have in our hearts for God and feed that hunger with food that doesn’t perish. I feel this is accomplished by living my configuration to Christ the best I know how, by being a man of prayer, to be there for people in good times and in bad, celebrating the sacraments, preaching the Gospel, celebrating liturgies that point us to heaven the best I can, and at times even building churches! I don’t see my life as “perfect” but it is oriented towards what I hunger most for, namely God.

What do you hunger for most? You don’t have to be a priest or sister to come up with the same answer. As St. Augustine famously articulated at the beginning of his Confessions, we are made for God and so our hearts are restless until they rest in God. And so, Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading to stop working for food that perishes. And to be clear, there is nothing wrong about wanting a good paycheck to take care of our families. There is nothing wrong with wanting to buy nice things from time to time. There is nothing wrong with serving other people’s needs or with bettering society with our livelihoods. It is just that, at the end of the day, there is

something lacking about all of it. Everything I buy eventually turns to dust. Everything I do in this life will eventually be forgotten by others. Even the human beings I serve or follow eventually disappoint. The only thing I have ever found to be ultimately satisfying in this life is a relationship with Jesus. And for me, this relationship is nurtured through prayer, spiritual reading, serving people and being fed by the sacraments of the Church. Sacraments do not perish. The Eucharist is food that leads to eternal life.

How I love the sacraments! Regardless of the worthiness of any given minister, and ministers come and go, sacraments are objective moments of grace whereby Jesus can physically and truly touch us. This is what I hunger for most. I hunger for God's touch. Don't you? Just as the Hebrews were fed manna in the desert on their way to the Promised Land, we are fed the Eucharist as we make our way through the desert of life to the eternal life that awaits. And so our Gospel wraps up with Jesus saying without equivocation, "I am the bread of life". The Eucharist is an objective moment of grace whereby Jesus himself can physically and truly touch us on our pilgrim journey through life. Hear it again. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will never hunger". And so we are left once more with a fundamental question: what do you hunger for most in this life?