

August 2, 2009

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## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Lectionary Reference Number - 113

### **Reading 1**

[Ex 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**

[Ps 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 II**

[Eph 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.

## **Gospel**

[Jn 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.”

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# HOMILY

I remember when I was in my 20's (I do have a long memory) the joy of a trip with friends to the wine country in Napa. We toured the wineries and the tasting rooms, then stopped at a bakery in Healdsburg for fresh bread to go with salami and a bottle of wine for a picnic. The memory of the smell, the taste, the texture and warmth of that freshly baked bread in my mouth is still sweet to my tongue.

That was the bread for life, a food that perishes, that is not what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel. Jesus' discourse, his formal discussion in John's Gospel of the Bread of Life, the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eucharist is about the spiritual. The crowd was still focused on the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and Jesus was now talking about something way beyond food for the stomach. There is something of cross purposes to Jesus' dialogue with the crowd in this discourse.

The crowd in the Gospel is fixated on the manna, the bread from heaven, that we heard about in our reading from the Book of Exodus. That manna and the quail were God's faithful response to the grumbling, starving Israelites' need for food, physical sustenance in the desert. God's fidelity and commitment to the Chosen People is constant and contrasted to the Israelites' discontent.

Jesus' response to the crowd's food concerns is to focus on the true bread from heaven, the bread of God that gives life to the world. This is not stomach food but soul food, food for the spirit. This bread of life is Jesus. Jesus' Good News offers that whoever comes to Jesus will never hunger and whoever believes in Jesus will never thirst. Untangle the cross purposes, separate the spiritual from the physical and Jesus' message becomes clear.

The hunger Jesus addresses is the human spirit's desire for meaning and purpose in our existence. The crowd asks, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answers simply, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." The only activity is not doing but believing in Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the one on whom God has set his seal. We do not/cannot earn God's love and the bread of life that nourishes our spirits because God freely gives it. Jesus is the new Moses, the one through whom the Father gives the true bread of life and heaven. This bread nourishes and sustains the spirit unlike the manna intended for the body. To receive this bread we have but to believe in Jesus. Freely given, never earned from God who loves us unconditionally even when we grumble, are discontented, or distracted or not paying any attention.

The key to applying all this information to our own living comes from Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians. The way for us individually and as a Church to grow into belief in Christ, to be nourished spiritually by the bread of life is to put away the old self and our former way of life, read our too earthly, physical human desires. Our task is to put on a new self, renewed in the spirit of our minds, that has been created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of the truth, that is, Jesus and the Good News.

Remember, last week, I said this Bread of Life discourse is all about hunger and what we do about it. To forsake the old self and put on the new self requires a hunger of the spirit. In a time and world marked by anorexia and terminal obesity and obsessed by diets and the body perfect, spirit hunger is less and less of a concern, a value, even a desire. Few, today, pay any attention to the big life questions of "what's it all about?", "is that all there is?", "what is the

meaning and purpose of my being alive?” Without that hunger, the bread of life is passé, irrelevant, avoidable, not worth wasting time on.

Note the need for hunger, the need for a new self. We gather each week for this Eucharist which can be so routine that its meaning is lost. We have to assess the level of our desire for the eucharistic bread and wine. Are we hungry for the bread of life? “Do not work for food that perishes but for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Are you hungry? Why not?

As we continue this service of thanks to our Creator, let us praise God for the love that offers/gives us the true bread of true life, and let us give God thanks by the depth of our rumbling hunger to receive that bread and put on our new self.

*Rev. Timothy K. Johnson*