

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus teaches about bread again in today's gospel reading, in this intense section of John's gospel. Here, Jesus really expresses his divine identity to the people, shocking the Jews with the transparency of his words, the truth revealed. He is from God. He belongs to heaven. Yet for the Jews, this was the son of Mary and Joseph. How dare he call God his Father! 'I am the bread of life,' he says twice in this passage. This living bread is the stuff of eternal life, and it is the very flesh of Jesus, Son of God.

Bread is the staple of human sustenance, at least since human beings have developed from the hunter gatherer stage of existence into the agricultural phase, when stability in movement allowed for the cultivation of grain and production of loaves, cakes and other basic grain products. Bread is the symbol of a developed people, a representation of family, and home.

In this series of bread related readings from chapter six of John's gospel we heard first of the feeding of five thousand people from five barley loaves and two fish. Then we heard of people searching after Jesus for more bread, for signs to affirm the miracle. The crowds were excited and confused. Jesus was revealing himself and they were both afraid and enthralled. Yet it was still so hard for them to move to from their everyday physical needs and desires to the spiritual recognition of God come among them. It is harder even for the Jews in the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus was when he spoke the words we have heard today.

Jesus sees into the hearts of those who search for him. He knows people seek him not to discern the signs of God in him, but because they have been filled with food, and they want more of it. Jesus is the way to fulfillment, the fulfillment of more food, as these people see it, who are blinded to the truth of his divinely sent mission. Jesus is for them a meal provider. He speaks to them about a different kind of food, a food that endures beyond the immediate, physical satisfaction of a loaf of fresh bread, even as they demand signs.

Jesus is the bread of life. He is the truth from heaven, received and taken into a person in the way that food is digested. The bread metaphor is so rich, so multi-faceted. Bread is the sacramental way of our communion with Jesus. The bread of our holy communion allows us to partake of Jesus, digest his truth, receive that which endures eternally longer than the bread of our daily meals.

Later in this chapter Jesus will say that the bread he will give is his body, given for the sake of the world. This is of course referring to the sacrifice of himself on the cross. When we take the bread of the eucharist, in holy communing, we take, and we receive the body of Christ, and we believe the Christ present in the sacrament is the means to eternal life. This is the imperishable food, the bread of Jesus himself, his truth, his teaching, his faithfulness to the word of God.

People are always looking for signs. They were looking for signs in the time Jesus spoke to them at Capernaum. We are looking for signs now. They looked for signs, hoping no doubt through the mix of emotions, even though they complained about him. But Jesus sees through all superficiality, all our desires to obtain instant gratification.

The same issue that Jesus addressed then is still with us. So many people believe the true bread of life is what they can afford to buy with the money they gain. You'll all know the saying, 'bringing home the bread.' The bread is the money. That's where we get the word 'breadwinner' from, the one who brings home the family income. Originally it really was bread money, the means to provide the staple food for daily meals. Now it means money to buy all those other things that fill us up – all the material things that add to our comfortable existence, that cushion us from feeling empty. And the more things we have, the greater the void to be filled. The 'give us this day our daily bread' of the Lord's prayer becomes harder and harder to fill, and even more do we long for the miracles to happen, satisfy us instantly.

Jesus issues so many warnings to us through his teaching on money and wealth accumulation. Beware, he says. Money is powerful. It gives us leverage over those without

it. It makes our lives more physically comfortable. It anaesthetises us against the harsh, cold realities of the lives of people struggling just to make a loaf of bread a day. Who has not fantasised about what they will do with the millions of dollars should they win the Lotto? Yet it really is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich and lost in the world of material prosperity to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And so, we need to ask, when is 'bread' just bread? At what point does it become more than the food that is sufficient for our daily needs – give us this day our daily bread, we pray – and when do we lose ourselves in the quest for what ordinary bread can become – the houses, investment properties, cars, company shares, elite lifestyles. At what point will we hear Jesus saying that he alone is the true bread of life, the one come down from heaven, the fulfillment of the manna that rained upon the people in the Old Testament. When will we cease to seek him for mere material satisfaction, personal gain? When will we embrace the spiritual labour that produces enduring food, food that fills the soul, closes the void caused by a diet of perishable food?

Jesus came to Capernaum to reveal something of his divine identity. People wanted him for personal gain, self-satisfaction, and if they couldn't have it they complained about him. He is the bread of life, given by the Father. He promises not money or riches, but true life coming from heaven and giving enduring life to the world. Whoever comes to the bread of life will never be hungry, never thirst. So, might we all say, 'Give us this bread always.'