

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B  
THE EUCHARIST AS THE NEW MANNA

*"I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never be hungry again; he who believes in Me will never thirst" (Jn. 6: 35)*

**Our Journey:** Last week we began the break-away journey from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of John, reading the sixth chapter, where we encountered the Miracle of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fish for the feeding of five thousand men (women and children not counted, Matthew 14: 21). John calls the miracles of Jesus "signs." For John, the miracles of Jesus are not simply miracles for the sake of miracles; they are pointers to realities beyond the immediate reality. Today we begin a gradual process of unravelling the mystery of the miracle of the multiplication of five loaves and two fish.

**The Great Complaints:** Life can throw many arrows at us that makes us forget the victories, joys, and celebrations of the past within a twinkle of an eye. The Israelites, in the First Reading (Ex. 16: 2-4, 12-15), confront a situation of test and difficulty. They have walked three days in the desert without finding water (Ex. 15: 22). They are equally hungry and begin to grumble and complain to Moses and Aaron (Ex. 15: 24; 16: 2). Their complaint is bitter, full of regrets and condemnation. They have forgotten the wonders the Lord had worked for their sake in the land of Egypt. The ten plagues, the deaths of the firstborn, the Crossing of the Sea of Reeds are forgotten and lost. All that matters is the "now", characterised by fear, starvation, and thirst. How easy it is for a complaining heart to forget the good deeds of the past? On bad days, to forget the good days; on sad days, we forget the days of joys and celebrations; when failure knocks at the door, we do not remember the days of victory. As Christians, we must learn to see these tough times as tests of what is in our hearts; they are calls to us to renew our trust in God and purify the motives of our faith. The same God that provided manna for the Israelites in the desert to take them to the Promised Land has provided us with The Bread of Life, to take us beyond earthly destinations to the heavenly kingdom. When we are in the dark, we need the grace to hold on.

**A Good Search for the Wrong Reason:** The setting of today's Gospel is the day after the miracle of the multiplication of loaves. On the evening of the miracle, the disciples went across the sea by boat to Capernaum, while Jesus remained in the hills all by Himself (John 6: 15-17). The following day, when the people realised that neither Jesus nor His disciples were with them, "they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus" (John 6: 24). When they found Him, they asked: "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (John 6: 25). The answer of Jesus is rather startling: "I tell you most solemnly, you are not looking for Me because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat" (John 6: 26). Jesus knew the reason for their interest and search for Him. They saw only the bread and the satisfaction it offered. So, they went in search of Jesus to have more food for their stomachs. Since the beginning of creation, man has been a slave to the stomach and material satisfaction. No wonder the devil tried to trap Jesus, as he did Adam, through the power of the stomach: "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4: 3). Why do we seek the Lord? What motivates our

relationship with God – material or spiritual needs? Why do we do the good things that we do – for human praise or love of God? Watch, our good deeds may be dusted by wrong motives.

**Here is the Right Direction:** Jesus knows His mission was not to satisfy mere human desires but so much more – “I have come that they may have life and have it in full (John 10: 10); and “I came ... to give My life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20: 28). So, Jesus turns their attention to something deeper, spiritual, and lasting. He says to them: “Do not work for food that cannot last but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on Him the Father, God Himself, has set His seal” (John 6: 27). He leads them from the natural, physical bread He gave them to the supernatural and spiritual bread that He is about to offer them. The admonition of Jesus here is to the fact that the spiritual is more important than the physical and that is what they, nay we, should seek and strive for. We are called to open our hearts to let the material things of this life lead us to the spiritual things that transcend the here and now. St. Paul exhorts us: “So we no longer pay attention to the things that are seen, but to those things that are unseen; for the things that we see last for a moment, but those things which cannot be seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4: 18). And again, he reminds us: “So then, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3: 1-2). Here is the right direction of our Christian journey.

**Faith is to Believe in Jesus:** To the question: “What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants? (John 6: 28). Jesus answers: “This is the work of God, that you believe in the One Whom He has sent.” (John 6: 29). The people had already recognised Jesus as “the prophet” by the fact of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. There was an expectation among the Jews of the time that the Messiah, the “new Moses”, would bring back the miracle of manna performed by the “old Moses.” Remember when they said: “This is the prophet who was to come into the world” (John 6: 14). It is within this context that they began to challenge Jesus to prove to them His identity: “What sign will You show us that we should believe in You? What work will you do” (John 6: 29). Is it not rather absurd that the same people who ate the loaves Jesus multiplied just the day before are here asking this? Why are they asking for more signs? Or rather, what other sign do they want to see? Like their fathers in the First Reading, they have forgotten the miracle of the day before. The request for signs is itself an expression of lack of faith.

**The New Moses:** “Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as Scripture says: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’ (John 6: 31). There is a direct link here with the First Reading (Exodus 16: 2-4; 12-15). So, they are challenging Jesus here: if You are the “new Moses”, give us manna to eat as the “old Moses” did for our fathers. Once they introduced manna, Jesus captures it to lead them into the mystery of the Eucharist and His identity as the True Manna from heaven. Before proceeding, Jesus takes time to correct them: “I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is My Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6: 32 -33). Notice here that Jesus identifies Himself as The Son of God by saying “it is My Father who gives you

the bread from heaven.” The response of the people here: “Lord, give us this bread always” (with emphasis on “always”) takes us back to the Jewish understanding of the relationship between the manna and the Messiah. Whereas the manna was transitory, dropping with the dew of the morning and disappearing with the rising sun in the day, the Messiah would provide the “new manna” that would be available “always.” More than that, whereas the manna of the “old Moses” lasted for only forty years, as the food for the journey, which supply seized as soon as the children of Israel crossed the Jordan (Joshua 4, 5), the Messiah’s “new manna” would be a lifetime supply. So, what they are asking Jesus to do here is to perform something greater than what Moses did, to go beyond the limits of Moses by providing the bread, not just for a time but “always,” not just for forty years, but for eternity. Then Jesus launches the Bread of Life Discourse: “I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never be hungry again; he who believes in Me will never thirst.” Jesus presents Himself as the True Bread of Life that satisfies not just the human physical hunger but spiritual hunger. This is what the Eucharist is, the Body and Blood of Christ, given to us as a manifestation of His love for us, to satisfy our spiritual hunger and lead us to eternal life.

**Dear friends,** St. Paul in the Second Reading (Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24) exhorts us to give up the old way of life; to put off the old self and put on the new self that is incorruptible and soaked in holiness. This journey begins when we ask some personal questions that will enable us to learn from the mistakes of the Israelites in the desert and crowd in the Gospel: why do I seek Jesus? Why do I pray? Why am I in Church today? What hunger do I feel? What satisfaction do I seek from Jesus? St. Ignatius of Loyola says: “Seek not the consolation of God, but the God of consolation.” May the Lord open our hearts and minds to understand, accept and revere His Presence in the Holy Eucharist, and receive Him worthily as spiritual food for our journey.