



AN EXTENDED TEACHING ON THE EUCHARIST

Introducing our five-week time with Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life, Patricia Sanchez writes:

On this Sunday and for the next four Sundays, the praying assembly will be the honored guests at a summer "picnic" hosted by God. There, on the mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee, all who wish may gather with the multitude that was fed by Jesus for an *extended Eucharistic encounter*. As the picnic encounter progresses, those present will also be nourished with the truth and wisdom of the Johannine Jesus' teaching about his life-giving death and the gift of his very self as food. Food is the most common of all the biblical images. God gives all things living food; God feeds the church at Eucharist; Christ is called Bread—*Living Bread*. Feeding the hungry is a basic responsibility for the Christian. In the scriptures, God's beneficence is described as feast, God's displeasure as famine and our penitence as fasting.

On a literal level, food is a necessity for human life. On a symbolic level, food—good and plenteous food—has become an image for everything humankind needs from God. Canaan was described, not as a picturesque and pleasant land, but as one flowing with milk and honey. In other words, it was to be a land for Israel in which good foods, both staples (milk) and treats (honey) were abundant.

Throughout the Jewish Scriptures, the sharing of food is featured as a significant event. Because food was regarded as God's gift of life, those with whom one shared food became important. Sharing food meant sharing life in God; those who ate together became bonded to one another in an everlasting union. Of particular significance was the shared meal at Passover, whereby the Israelites celebrated their God-gained freedom, their identity as a people and their covenantal relationship with their Liberator and Lord.

Having acknowledged the role that food played in Jewish life, the more readily we can understand the significance of food in the New Testament. Born in Bethlehem, i.e., in the village called "house of bread," Jesus challenged his followers to be food for others, salt in the world (Matthew 5:13), without which humankind cannot survive. Six times the four evangelists have portrayed Jesus as multiplying bread in order to feed the multitudes. Through Jesus' actions, the miracle of the

manna was reprised and the gift of the Eucharist was anticipated.

Because of their extended reflection and focus on John 6, these next five weeks of "picnicking" with Jesus and the multitudes will bring home to us the realization that Jesus does not just *provide* bread; rather, Jesus *is* the Bread. Eating this bread also brings home the realization that all our life, like all our bread, comes from God. In acknowledgement of this, Jesus taught his followers to pray to God for the gift of bread, i.e., all we need for life—*daily*.

First reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44

Continuing her introduction to the next five weeks of feasting with Jesus, Patricia Sanchez writes:

In today's first reading, the narrative of Elisha multiplying barley loaves provides the background for John's stipulation that the bread Jesus multiplied was barley bread—the food of the poor. *Next Sunday*, the first reading will focus on the gift of manna (and quail) in the desert, thus setting the scene for acknowledging Jesus as the new manna. On the *Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time*, the praying assembly will hear the story of Elijah being fed and prepared by God for his 40-day trek to Horeb (Sinai); this reading is paired with that section of John 6 wherein Jesus offers those who would journey with him in this life and who would live forever with him in the next. A Proverbs text on the *Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time* describes the rich banquet Wisdom prepares for those who seek her and sets the scene for the gospel in which Jesus invites believers to feed on him and so to have life. On the final Sunday (Twenty-First Sunday) of this extended Eucharistic meditation, the covenant renewal at Shechem (Joshua) prepares the praying assembly for the conclusion of John 6. Therein, the fourth evangelist details the varying reactions and responses to Jesus' compelling yet challenging Eucharistic invitation. Some find it too shocking to endure; their faith was shaken, and they would no longer remain in Jesus' company. Others, represented by Peter, pledge their faith in Jesus as God's Holy One and commit themselves to him, just as Joshua and his people committed themselves to God. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Today, the *challenge of believing* and the *choice of remaining* with Jesus are set once again before each of

us. Like Peter and all those other believing disciples, it is ours to decide whether or not we shall continue to find food in Jesus and be nourished with the Bread of the Eucharist and the Bread of his Word. "Lord, to whom shall we go? By whom else shall we be fed? You have the bread; you have the words of eternal life."

The great theologian Karl Rahner, S.J., once explained that the people in today's gospel were drawn to Jesus, driven by a hunger for God. They followed Jesus into the wilderness because they were aware that their own lives were a wilderness; they hungered for the words Jesus spoke. They wanted more than their ordinary lives were able to offer them but while they were hungering for God, they found themselves hungering for earthly life. Then the situation turned strange.

Jesus, whom they were following to hear the words of life, gave them earthly bread and fish. When they ate and had their fill, they wanted to make him king (6:15). What was offered as nourishment to sustain them in their search for God became a temptation, prompting them to covet the "free lunch" and to lose sight of its significance. As a result, Jesus fled from them. Rahner suggests that this is a parable of what constantly happens in the lives of individuals, particularly in our technological age.

God enables us to develop the technology so that we can have our earthly bread and multiply it so as to feed the great multitudes who live in the many wildernesses of this world. Technological advances should give us more time to seek for God's bread and to satisfy our hunger for eternity. But we, like the people in today's gospel, are tempted by the miracle and want to make God the king of our technology; or worse, technology becomes our god. And so God withdraws from us, not willing to become a part of our scheme.

Today's readings remind us of the balance that must be struck. If we have been blessed with an abundance of earthly bread or with the technical capabilities to produce such an abundance, then these gifts are for sharing with the hungry. When physical hungers are satisfied, then we are free to attend to the deeper hungers: for love, mercy, forgiveness, companionship, peace and fulfillment. In satisfying these hungers for one another, we realize and sharpen our hunger for God, who is always ready to satisfy the hungry heart.

The second reading—one for our refrigerator door.

For the next several weeks, our second reading will be from Ephesians. Today's passage, as follows, is very beautiful and it could be placed on our refrigerator door.

Brothers and sisters: I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
(Ephesians 4:1-6)

Paul, writing perhaps from prison, encourages them:

- "to live in a manner worthy of the call they have received," to be who they are.
- to be humble, gentle, patient and loving. These are four great and important virtues to practice. When they are practiced, we have peaceful homes, work places, parishes and nations.

In Praise of Bread

*Be gentle when you touch bread.
Let it not lie uncared for—unwanted.
So often bread is taken for granted.
there is much beauty in bread—
Beauty of sun and soul,
Beauty of patient toil.
Winds and rain have caressed it,
Christ often blessed it.
Be gentle when you touch bread.
(author unknown)*

Do it anyway

The following piece of wisdom was written by Dr. Kent Keith. Mother Teresa hung it on the walls of one of her orphanages.

*"People are illogical, unreasonable,
and self-centered,
Love them anyway.
If you do good, people will accuse you
of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway...
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway...
People really need help but may attack you
if you do help them.
Help people anyway.
Give the world the best you have and
you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you've got anyway.*

Have a blessed week,

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