

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 30, 2006 B

AN EXTENDED TEACHING ON THE EUCHARIST

The Bread of Life Discourse found in John Chapter 6 is considered to be so important to the life of the church that every three years the church takes a five week break from reading the Gospel of Mark in order to meditate on Jesus' teachings on revealing himself as the Bread of Life. Normally, we have five weeks of listening to John chapter 6. This year is an exception because the *Feast of the Transfiguration* falls on a Sunday (next Sunday). When this happens, the Transfiguration is given precedence. So this year we will only have four Sundays of listening to the Bread of Life Discourse.

On the Sundays that we listen to John's Bread of Life discourse we will also have readings from the Old Testament, which also focus on food and on how God feeds his people. Our second readings will be from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fish

John's miracles are *signs*—pointing to a deeper reality, namely, to the identity of Jesus. The miracle of the loaves and fishes (the only miracle that appears in all four Gospels) reveals to us One who feeds not only our belly hungers, but also our soul hunger. Jesus presents himself as the one who feeds our deepest needs. The miracle has strong Eucharistic overtones. Just as at the Last Supper, Jesus *takes* bread, *blesses* it, and *distributes* it to them. The twelve baskets of leftovers stresses the abundance that characterizes the Messianic era. The gospel ends with the crowds misunderstanding the miracle or sign that Jesus had just worked. When the people see what a wonderful Wonder Worker Jesus is, they want to make him King so that he will drive out the Romans and take care of their material needs. Jesus wants them to see him as one who will nourish their deepest soul needs without, of course, ignoring their other needs.

First Reading—Trusting in God to Provide

As you probably know by now, the first reading each Sunday is chosen to connect in some way with the gospel reading. The connection this week is pretty obvious.

In this reading, an unnamed man brings to a shrine twenty barley loaves, which represented the *first fruits* of the harvest. Normally, these would be offered to God

in thanksgiving for the harvest. But, in this case the prophet Elisha orders that the bread be given to the one hundred starving men. The donor objects, but Elisha insists saying this is what God wants ("Thus say the Lord"). Not only will there be enough bread but also, there will be leftovers to stress the generosity of God. The key point in this story is the efficacy of the word of God delivered through a "man of God".

The Second Reading—could be posted on everyone's refrigerator. Lets listen to it again. Paul writes:

*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.*

Reflecting on the above verses, Patricia Sanchez writes:

Noblesse oblige! Nobility obliges! In a sense, this was what the Ephesians author was telling his readers when he advised: "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received". Called to salvation by God and baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, believers are thereby *responsible for reflecting their relationship with Christ* in every aspect of their day-to-day existences. Previously in this letter, the author had described the essence of Christian vocation in terms of unity among believers established by union with God through Christ and in the Spirit. In these verses he explains how the believer can translate that unity into a moral or ethical expression.

Citing what William Barclay has called "five of the great basic words of the Christian faith," the author of Ephesians painted a portrait of a model disciple.

1. Rooted in truth and an awareness of one's unworthiness, Christian *humility* begins to evolve when a person compares his/her life to the life of Christ and begins to accurately assess the demands of God. True

humility is not obsequious kowtowing but an acknowledgment of the need for conversion and a trusting in the power of grace to transform who we are into what we have been called to become.

2. Second of the virtues is *meekness*. Meekness strikes the balance between two extremes. As Barclay explained, the meek person is kindled by indignation at the wrongs and sufferings of others but is never moved to anger by the wrongs and insults he himself/she herself has to bear. Animals which had been tamed or domesticated were also called meek. For the Christian, *this meekness comes from surrender to the power and will of God.*

3. *Patience* or long-suffering is that quality of spirit which never gives in to weakness. "Golden-tongued" John Chrysostom defined patience as the spirit which has the power to take revenge but never does so. *Patience* does not retaliate; it is *the spirit that bears injury and insult without complaint.* In the Christian scriptures, it is God who is continually characterized as patient (Romans 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:15). Since believers have become one with God in Christ, it devolves upon them to strive for similar patience.

4. Fourth among the basic words of faith is *love*. Of the four Greek terms for love—*eros* (sexual love), *philia* (warm, affectionate friendship), *storge* (familial affection) and *agape* (complete altruism) - the Ephesians author called his readers to aspire to *agape*. *Agape* moves beyond physical, friendly and even familial love and beyond emotion; it is a virtue of the will, mind and heart which always seeks the ultimate benefit and welfare of the other without reciprocity.

5. These four Christian virtues issue forth in *peace* so that believers may live together in all the glorious onenesses of God. The seven-fold proclamation of unity with which this reading ends provides the reasons for and fruits of the harmony of the Christian community: *one* body of believers with *one* hope and *one* faith, sharing *one* baptism in *one* Jesus, belonging to *one* God in *one* Spirit. This unity has yet to be fully realized. Perhaps, this call from our elder brother in the faith will whet our appetites and sharpen our hunger for the

oneness which is to distinguish us as Christ's own.

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 soil,
Beauty of patient toil.
Winds and rain have caressed it,
Christ often blessed it.
Be gently
When you touch bread.*
(author unknown)

Do It Anyway

The following poem 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 have anyway.*

Have a blessed week,

Le Saran