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COME SPIRIT!!

18th Ordinary Time B: Do we Want His Bread?

Last Sunday we began five weeks of Gospels from the sixth chapter of *John*. This long chapter of 69 verses is the basis for much of what we believe about the Eucharist. I would suggest reading the entire chapter and letting it speak to you.

Today's Gospel takes place the day after the events were heard about last Sunday. Last Sunday we heard about the multiplication of loaves. In today's Gospel the people who had been fed search for Jesus. They really don't want Him. They want free food. Jesus uses this as an opportunity to speak about the food that really matters, the Bread of Life that God provides. He tells them about a gift of food that they knew very well, the manna in the desert during the time of Moses. This was seen as the greatest gift of God. It was His daily testimony of His love and care for His People until they arrived at the Holy Place He would give them. Jesus mentions that they ate the manna, but they were still hungry. Jesus would provide food that would not leave them hungry, the Bread of Life.

So we come before the Lord this and every Sunday, or perhaps for some of us, every day, and we say to the Lord, "Feed me." But do we really want to be fed? The food that God gives demands a total commitment to Him. It is called the Bread of Life. We often, rightly so focus on the "bread" part as we discuss the Eucharist. It is the "life" part I want to consider today.

The life offered is certainly not life as we usually use the term. It is not referring to physical life. We eat the Bread of Life and die from cancer, heart attacks, accidents, etc. The Life

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offered is the Life of Christ. It is the spiritual life that we receive at our Baptism and which remains after our physical death. The Bread Jesus gives nourishes this life, helps us grow stronger spiritually and more powerful in the battle for the Kingdom of God.

Receiving this bread is a commitment to the life. When we go to communion we are bound by the Presence within us to live His Life in a way that gives evidence of His Life in the world. For the committed Catholic, religion is not a sometimes affair, not a once a week happening. For us religion means being bound to Christ. The very word religion comes from the Latin work *ligar e* which means to be bound. Our faith is who we are, people bound to Christ.

Many people, hopefully none here, but many people will disagree with this. They will say that a person shouldn't take his or her faith too seriously. Or that decisions should not be based on faith but on what is expedient, pleasurable, etc. There is some of this in all of us. There is that dark part of us that wants to believe that we can put our faith in a corner of our lives, but do not have to let it overwhelm our lives. It is the part of us that longs for the fleshpots of Egypt, even though we know that the price of fleeting pleasure is slavery. This is the part of us that goes to Church on Sundays but thinks it is quite alright to get drunk on Fridays. It is that part of us that really does not want to be fed with the Bread of Life.

For example people come upon someone who is considering a religious vocation, and questions him or her saying that he or she could be a successful professional and make a lot of money. Or if someone says that he or she wants

to live in an area where there is a vibrant parish, or go to a
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college where there is a solid Catholic campus ministry, some people would say, "Well, that wouldn't be my priority." There is that part of us that really does not want to be fed with the Bread of Life. And this is absolutely frightening. Jesus says in today's Gospel that He is the Bread of Life. If we push aside our commitment to the new Life of the Lord, then we are pushing Jesus aside.

But there is another part of us, hopefully it is the dominating force within us. This is the part that truly wants to grow in the Life of the Lord every day until we die. It is the part that always wants more of Him. It is the part that wants to wake up in His Presence, go about our daily routine in His Presence, and sleep in His Presence. "A Christian is not his own master. His time is God's," St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote shortly before he died. There is a part of us that knows in the core of our being that this is true. It is the part of us that cries out with the people in the Gospel, "Lord, give us this bread always."

And He does. And we come to a deeper understanding that there is nothing we can gain in life that has value except that which comes from Jesus and returns to Him.

He is the Bread of Life.