

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

For the third Sunday in a row, our lectionary leads us into the gospel reading from the one immediately preceding it. These gospel stories according to St. John are deemed so important to our spiritual growth in the Body of Christ that, again, we have them right after another.

Now, the truth is, because of summer and all the comings and goings of vacations and the like in the month of August, chances are some here have missed a lesson or two these last few weeks. At the risk of being repetitive, I would ask for your indulgence for a review.

Two weeks ago, we heard about Jesus feeding the five thousand, starting with a boy's five loaves of bread and two fish. But the real lesson from Jesus came as a test of the disciples, who stalled, or froze, or doubted in the face of the overwhelming task of feeding these people. It was a lesson of leadership, centered by faith in God. Jesus did not question, or worry, or wonder to the point of indecision. He did something...trusting in God to help with the rest.

Teaching them...and us...about life. Life, through faith...not fear.

Last week, we heard how some..and not all...searched Jesus out the next day. On finding him, Jesus directly called them out on their motives, saying the only reason they were looking for him was for their breakfast...their next meal. Do not bother with that, he says. Focus your efforts on "heavenly food"...which I will give you. They catch on, obviously remembering the miracle of God from the day before. "What do we have to do to perform the works of God?" In other words, you mean that God can and will work through me also? How?

"Believe in me," Jesus says. That is it, as simple as that sounds..and is. But he obviously has more to teach, with today's continuation of John's gospel.

"I am the bread of life", he says...repeating what we heard last Sunday. "The bread that came down from heaven." And the Jews...which was the name which John's gospel uses to identify the non-believers...they essentially say, "What? Wait a second. Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary? Where is he getting this bread from heaven stuff?"

And the reply by Jesus to that is illuminating. "I was born of Mary, alright..but so what? You do not get it...you do not understand who I am and what I am...and you will not unless the Father brings you to me. The Father is the one who teaches...is the one who sent me, and is the one who will lead others to me. And...whoever believes has....not shall have...but has eternal life, because I am the living bread that came down from heaven."

The use of the word "murmuring" to describe the complaining by the nonbelievers is not considered as accidental. In fact, direct reference is made by Jesus back to the children of Israel who

also “murmured” their displeasure in the wilderness...and, in John’s gospel, Jesus calls attention to the typology of manna and Eucharist. These folks knew where he came from, and knew his presumed parentage. But the reply of Jesus to this misunderstanding proclaims that a knowledge of his heavenly origin in calling is possible only to those who are drawn to him in faith by the Father.

The earthly origins of Jesus are not denied, but faith sees beyond them...just as the Creed asserts that Jesus was born of Mary as a historical fact, but also, as a confession of faith by the Church, that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And now we have a bridge to cross...further illuminated by the epistle reading appointed for today. Paul’s letter to the saints at the church in Ephesus.

Here is a group of disciples who are working to pass the test of leadership within faith...as Paul reminds them, “...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.”

Here is a group of people who, individually, asked the question that we saw in last Sunday’s gospel reading: “What do I have to do to perform the works of God?”

And they dared, in their heart of hearts, to ask that question...because....

Here is a group of people who were called by the Father to believe in the Son. That the Son is the living bread, come down from heaven.

Here is bread. For thousands of years, it is THE absolute foundation of bodily sustenance known to the ancient world outside of the Orient. It was then, and still is today...across the globe. In his book, *The Power of Holy Habits*, Bill Hinson says that, in the Middle East, bread is the heart of a meal. People do not use forks because putting an object in their mouth defiles them, and they would eat by repeatedly defiling themselves. Instead, they break off a piece of bread, use the bread to pick up their meat, and put bread and meat in their mouth. Without bread, they could not eat. Bread is the way to life.

When Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," he was saying, I am the way by which you can receive spiritual nourishment.

This Sunday’s gospel gives real meaning to our lives, in the here and now. May we each have the spiritual drive from God the Father to seek out Jesus, and then have the personal courage to believe in him, all to give complete meaning to our lives on this earth, as we move to perform the works of God...in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.