

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 1st August 2021 - 18th Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Exodus 16:2-4. 12-15. Psalm: 77. 2nd: Ephesians 4:17. 20-24. Gospel: John 6:24-35.

We all know that adverts for anything free are immediately swept up. So if we advertised free food the queue would wind round the corner. My dad always said nothing is free, someone has paid for it.

Jesus surprised the hungry crowd of 5000 as he fed all of them from the five barely loaves and two fish, with enough over to fill 12 hampers. Now they have followed him for more. Jesus knew that they had followed him not because of his teaching but because they saw him as one who could fill their bellies. If they made him their national leader, as we were told at the end of last Sunday's gospel they wanted to do, they would be able to live a life of ease, with their material needs miraculously provided for. In the conversation which follows, Jesus sought to use this gross misunderstanding of his mission as an opportunity to show them what were their real spiritual needs, and how he, as the spiritual 'food' sent by his Father like manna in the desert, could give them the only true satisfaction, which is eternal life.

Jesus rebukes them for not understanding that the bread they were given was, primarily, a symbol of something else. They have not given a thought to that possibility – they simply wanted another free meal, and are not afraid to admit it. They ask Jesus to do for them what Moses did for their ancestors, that is, provide daily bread from heaven. The link once again with Moses. Jesus responds by telling them that they should ask for a different kind of food. Even the bread Moses gave their ancestors was not "the" bread of heaven. It may have helped them physically from day to day, but it was not lasting, sustaining food. It was not the definitive answer to their problems.

His audience probably recalled that the manna from heaven could only be eaten on the day it fell. Whatever was left over became spoilt by the next day. The accounts in the books of Exodus and Numbers of the journey of the Israelites through the desert after the flight from Egypt are punctuated with stories of God's love and care for the people as they display an entire

lack of trust in God and his servant Moses whom he has appointed to lead them, voicing bitter complaints about their hardships and dangers. Their only concern, as with the crowds in today's gospel, is with the immediate satisfaction of their bodily needs.

All picked up in the Psalm, which is a short extract from a very long Psalm, one of the so called 'historical Psalms' which retells the story of God's love and care for his people.

In the 2nd Reading St Paul develops the theme from last Sunday. His readers, who have only recently been converted to the Christian faith, are told that their Christian profession must be accompanied by a complete change in their way of life. The life led by the non-Christian's among whom they live and work is described as the aimless pursuit of worthless and unworthy desires. This new life is God's way of goodness and holiness which we know and find in Jesus.

Jesus in the gospel then begins to speak about another bread: **himself**. When he says, "I am the bread of life," Jesus is describing a remedy that will definitely take away all hunger, just as our thirst will definitely be quenched once we listen to him. Initially Jesus is referring to himself as God's revealing word. He is the bread to satisfy the deepest hungers of life and the insatiable thirsts of the spirit. Only later will this chapter change to the theme of his presence in the bread of the Eucharist. He feeds our faith with the bread of his word before he nourishes our souls with his on flesh and blood. Hence the two tables in the sanctuary: The table of the word & the table of the Sacrament. The teaching and the meal.

Try to relate Jesus' words to the concrete reality of our world now, because he intended that they should have a practical application. If we were to live life in the way Jesus showed us, no one would ever die of hunger and no elderly person of loneliness. We would be washing each other's feet and serving each other at the table of this world. We would pass away, but we would never die, because we had shared in the true bread of heaven.

Canon Philip Dyson

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