

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 1, 2021 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died at the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!"

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.

"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God."

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Psalm: Ps 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

R. (24b) The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

What we have heard and know,
and what our fathers have declared to us,
we will declare to the generation to come
the glorious deeds of the LORD and his strength
and the wonders that he wrought.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

He commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven;
he rained manna upon them for food
and gave them heavenly bread.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

Man ate the bread of angels,
food he sent them in abundance.
And he brought them to his holy land,
to the mountains his right hand had won.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Brothers and sisters: I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; that is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Gospel: John 6:24-35

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Doesn't the word "falling" describe our lives? Falling into debt, falling from faith, falling into blazing temperatures, or freezing ones, or happening into fallen youths, saying "what shall we believe in?" And the fall of that one true foundation of society, the family? The First Reading talks about a time like ours. God had pulled his people out of ancient captivity by sending them on a 40-year "exodus" ("wandering") from Egypt. But in the difficult journey and fierce heat, things had begun to collapse. The freed people began to scorn and censure Moses and Aaron, their leaders. They actually said that they would rather have been killed in the land of Egypt—which at least had flesh-pots to eat from—than to starve, wandering, through the desert. And how does anyone face the "falling apart" of the world? Maybe these words of Annie Lamott hold a key: *When a lot of things start going wrong all at once, it is to protect something big and lovely that is trying to get itself born ... and this something needs for you to be distracted so that it can be born as perfectly as possible.**

In that ancient, 40 year "exodus," something very big and lovely was trying to be born. God was holding the people's "falling to pieces" gently. He sent a huge flock of quail for meat, and also "bread from heaven" (manna) from the skies. The Gospel for Sunday flows straight out of this incident. The crowd that Jesus had fed grumbled to him: Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written. "[But Moses] gave them bread from heaven to eat." What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? This is a strange question, since only the day before Jesus had multiplied five barley loaves till there was enough to feed this very same huge crowd. Did they forget in one day? Jesus replied, "It was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." God sends the manna, God sends Jesus, the true manna. God holds it all in his kindly hands.

There is a poem by the German poet, Reiner Maria Rilke, which may apply here. If you will indulge me, I will quote it. It is called "Autumn." The leaves are falling, falling as if from afar, as if from some far garden in the sky. They fall with gestures of denial. And in the nights the heavy earth falls out of all the stars, in the loneliness. We all fall. This hand, here, falls. And look at the rest: it is in everything. And yet, there is one, who holds all this falling endlessly softly in his hands. Perhaps the careening earth, the crushing human affairs, everything that falls apart, all of it, every bit of it, perhaps it has behind it something big and lovely trying to get itself born. There is really no other answer to the continuing state of the world, the failures of our lives, the dropping away of opportunities, the shattering economy, the terrible leadership—no answer at all unless those supporting hands make our falling safe somehow and support it with tenderness. So, instead of despairing, let us wait and let us help in the birth. Perhaps something most lovely is being born.

* From Anne Lamott, *Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith*. Riverhead Books. 2007, p. 107.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. The Israelites grumbled about the lack of food in the desert. They remembered their abundant pots of animal flesh in Egypt when they were captives. How is your trust in God when God calls you to new journeys in your spiritual life or ministry?
2. One translation has Paul calling the Ephesians to a spiritual revolution (drastic change). If you personally were to have a spiritual revolution, what would go and what would stay in your life? Would you add anything new?
3. "Our ancestors ate manna in the desert." What is the food you need for your life's journey? Why do you think Jesus comes to us as bread or even as food/nourishment?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Draw near to your servants, O Lord, and answer their prayers with unceasing kindness, that, for those who glory in you as their Creator and guide, you may restore what you have created and keep safe what you have restored. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen