

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on August 13, 2006
Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year B

My father is an Italian American, and my mother is an Irish American. Our home was quite conventional growing up. I've never seen my father cook except when we had a barbeque. My mother is a straight-forward cook – nothing extravagant. Consequently, bread in our home when I grew up was white bread, in fact, Wonder Bread. Scali bread was an occasional treat. Pumpernickel was, like Irish soda bread, a rare treat. There was something quite ordinary about bread and then something very rare too.

In the Scripture today, the same is true. There was ordinary bread and then something rare. There was the ordinary baked bread of daily life and the unleavened bread of Passover. Bread was so standard a part of life that it had symbolic qualities. The “bread of idleness” was not to be eaten by the good wife nor by the good husband in an enlightened home. The evil people were referred to as those who ate the “bread of wickedness”. Bread was not just a stable element of the daily diet – it could be used to identify the quality of one's character.

Jesus has been dealing with bread today. Two weeks ago, we heard that He multiplied the five barley loaves to feed 5,000. He did this as a sign. Today, He clarifies the meaning of that sign: “I am the Bread of Life.” We can't miss the reference to the Eucharist that flows out of today's passage. Today, Jesus is making a claim about Himself: “When I say I am the Bread of Life – I am essential for you to have life.”

Then there is a bit of a setback. Some said, “You're a nice guy, but you are pretty ordinary. We know your family. Your father and mother are quite ordinary.” Jesus responds clearly, “That's not really true. If you want to really know God, you need to come to Me.”

This claim brings us to the center of our faith – our essential relationship with Christ. Christ has a relationship with each one of us. We were united to Him in Baptism. We are taught by Him in the Gospel every week. Our companionship with His is deepened every week at the Eucharist. But we must let Him at every turn become essential to our living. It is often a challenge, but it is also an adventure. A challenge – to admit that my most basic hunger in life can't be satisfied apart from Christ. An adventure – becoming the person God really wants me to be, by the life and sustenance that Christ offers us.

St. Paul knew that challenge and the adventure. To live in love, he says today, is to live in Christ, Whose love is the very love of God, making us not just good people but imitators of God. As we meet Christ, the Bread of Life, in the Eucharist, let us open our hearts to all that He offers us and then let Him become the way we live throughout the week.