

As I mentioned last week for the next few weeks our Sunday Gospels will come from Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John, “The Bread of Life Discourse.” And to continue with last week’s homily this teaching of Jesus that he is the Bread of Life, that his flesh and blood are real food, that you must eat his Body and drink his blood will be developed in such a way that those listening will be challenged to go ever deeper in faith.

The Bread of Life discourse begins with the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which is a profoundly desirable thing. It’s a good deal, a free lunch-if Jesus could keep this up hey we won’t have to work so hard in order not to starve to death.

So that is basically what is happening in today’s Gospel. The crowds have come searching for Jesus and why, as Jesus says, “Because you have had your fill of bread.” “Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life.” You have to search for something more.

Charles Taylor is a Canadian academic, professor emeritus from McGill and one of the areas he studies is the rise of secularism in Western culture. In his book, A Secular Age, he lays out his thesis; for over a thousand pages he meanders through a lot of history and philosophy and uses far too many words, but at the beginning of his book he sets out this definition.

“I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity, in my sense, has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing. Of no previous society was this true... A secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable; or better, it falls within the range of an imaginable life for masses of people.” **No final goals beyond human flourishing.**

Going back to the Gospel. In Jesus’ day one would define not having to work to get one’s bread as probably the pinnacle of human flourishing. 95% of people, spent 95% making sure there was enough to eat. So not having to do that – great - no wonder they chased after Jesus. But where are you going to go from there. Are you looking for something more? Find in me, find in the Eucharist, find that something more.

However, if there are no goals beyond human flourishing, if there are no transcendent goals, no eternal goals then we are not going to make that step.

When Taylor uses the term “human flourishing” it is a very well thought out term because he doesn’t want to get caught in the trap that our secular age is strictly about a crass materialism. Our psychological and spiritual goals also have no transcendent reference point either.

For example, in a marriage prep course when we strike up the conversation about religion it immediately turns into a discussion about handing on morals and values to children; the same reasoning when someone is asked why they want their children to go to a Catholic School. Other examples, why do we practice yoga, or meditation, or spend big bucks on nutritional

supplements? It is about providing the tools so we can flourish as well-balanced human beings but what about the encounter with God? What about the path to eternity?

So let us listen very carefully today to these words of Jesus, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”