

Sunday 18 of Ordinary Time, Year B
August 1, 2021 St. Mary

Ex 16.2-4,12-15
Eph 4.17,20-24
Jn 6.24-35

There is cause to rejoice today. The fact that we are in church right now means we are alive—even if you don't feel alive at 7:30 Sunday morning. But alive we are; and we should be grateful for the things that keep us alive. Things like food, clothing and shelter—the basic necessities we all know and pursue. But also things like sleep, clean air, or at least oxygen: things necessary for life, which we tend to take for granted. And don't forget phosphorous, sulfur, carbon. These are essential for life, too—but do we ever shop for sulfur? Do you even know what sulfur does for you?

Just as there are essentials for bodily life, so there are necessities for spiritual life. The basic needs would be prayer, renunciation of sin, pursuit of virtue, and sacraments. Like our bodily necessities, how often do we think of these? How diligently do we pursue them? Take, for example, the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life—do we hunger for it, like we hunger for pizza? Or is it like sleep: I'll get it when I have to? Or maybe like sulfur: I don't even know what it does for me?

The gospel today begins Jesus' Bread-of-Life discourse. The previous scene was Jesus feeding a crowd of over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Now those people are attracted to him. At first, Jesus accuses them of simply wanting more food, and he's probably right; then he directs their attention to the feeding as a Messianic sign, a sign that points to eternal life. That life will come through a new bread he will give: not from barley, not manna, but the Bread of Life, himself, come down from heaven to give life to the world. This bread will be for those who believe in him and come to him. When the discourse continues next week, Jesus will declare that this bread is his own flesh. Many of his followers will struggle to accept that, and they will leave.

It's hard to blame people for being skeptical of Jesus. In talking about his flesh given as bread, he sounds like a nut. But the key events for understanding the Bread of Life had not yet taken place—i.e., Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. While Matthew, Mark and Luke show it more clearly than John, Jesus will institute the Eucharist at the Last Supper. On that night he will take bread and give it to his disciples, saying, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it. For this is my body, which will be given up for you." In this action he will establish a covenant. Covenants are traditionally sealed with a sacrifice; and over the next few hours, Jesus will willingly be arrested, tried, scourged and crucified, completing the sacrifice. Then God the Father, beholding his Son's unwavering fidelity to his will, will send the Holy Spirit to raise the faithful Son to new life. And the resurrected Son will send the same Spirit upon the whole world. That Holy Spirit will evermore work in the sacraments, making the sacramental signs always more than meets the eye. So, the waters of baptism will be the tomb of Christ, where we will enter his covenant, dying with Jesus and rising with him, sharing his resurrected life. And the Eucharist will be the memorial of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection; and in remembering those events, they will be present anew to us, every time. We will renew the covenant by offering the sacrifice anew to the Father. Jesus will be present through bread that has mystically

become his flesh, which we will take into ourselves to be renewed in his life. If Jesus' followers had seen any of this coming, they might not have abandoned him. Instead, they might have been impatient to celebrate the Eucharist.

To celebrate the Eucharist is why we are in this church this morning. We are alive, right now. We seek eternal life, in God's kingdom. We know that life is found through the Bread of Life. Receive that bread with confidence that the Holy Spirit makes Jesus himself present in it; and be thankful for the gift of life the rest of this beautiful Sunday.