Dear Friends,

As human beings, we hunger for many things besides food and material possessions. We hunger to be recognized and honored, to love and be loved, to be listened to and to be appreciated, to connect with people, and to receive gratitude. On a deeper level every human being needs spiritual resources to help heal the painful wounds of grief, guilt, resentment, unforgiveness, self-rejection, and shame. But only God can satisfy our various forms of spiritual hunger. St. Augustine said: “O God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” (Confessions, I, 1.).

Today’s Gospel presents an introduction to Jesus’ famous discourse on the Holy Eucharist in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews who had gone around the Lake and come to Capernaum searching for him. The people were looking for a repeat performance of their miraculous feeding. In answer to their question, “Rabbi, when did You get here?” Jesus told them that they were only looking for another free meal and that such meals would not satisfy them, saying, “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 sent His seal.”

Though identifying Himself as “the bread of life” (v. 35), Jesus is not yet speaking about the Sacramental Eucharist in this part of his Eucharistic discourse. Here, the emphasis is placed on the Faith-acceptance of the teaching of Jesus. In other words, Jesus offers us the life-giving words of God about the meaning of our lives. His message only gives life when we accept it and when it leads us from selfishness to selfless and sacrificial service for others. Jesus states that He is the Bread of Life only for the one who “comes” to and “believes” in Him (v. 35). Jesus offered to satisfy the spiritual hunger of the people gathered around on one condition. They must believe Jesus is the “One,” that is, the Messiah, sent with the message that God is a loving, holy, and forgiving Father, and not a punishing judge. Belief in Jesus is not simple intellectual assent, but an authentic, total commitment to Him of loyalty and solidarity. There is no reference yet to eating His Body or drinking His Blood, which will come later.

It is easy to accept Jesus as a great teacher or spiritual guru. But this discourse is challenging the people around him and us the twenty first believer to move to a faith encounter. “I AM the Bread of Life”: throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus uses the expression “I AM …” seven times (indicative of completeness), to introduce various key images by which He describes His person and His mission: “I AM … the True Bread … the True Light … the Gate … the Way … the Good Shepherd … the Resurrection and the Life … the True Vine.” However, on an even deeper theological level, the Greek expression ἐγώ εἰμί (“I am”) relates back to the scene (Ex 3:14), when God tells Moses to use this name (a shortened form of the Divine Name YHWH, “I AM Who I AM”) in asking Pharaoh to free the enslaved Israelites. “I AM” is, therefore, an explicitly Divine title, and by using it repeatedly throughout this Gospel, Jesus is making a radical claim to BE the God that the Israelites had known in the time of Moses and the Exodus. (Dr. Watson Murray).

To enter into the realm of faith is not easy as we tend to live and think primarily with sensory perceptions and intellectual acumen. When we accept the divinity of Christ in faith, we move towards the dimension of living in depth. We are asking him to guide and lead us. We are accepting that we do not know enough to make the final moves and so we need to pray. We then begin to live like spiritual beings in a material body with its physicality and needs, but still aware of our spiritual depth and connection with the divine creator.

Be blessed, Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.
WORSHIP & MEDITATION

FIRST READING
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 I will test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.” (Ex 16:4)

PSALM
The Lord gave them bread from heaven. (Ps 78)

SECOND READING
... 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. (Eph 4:23-24)

GOSPEL
“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (Jn 6:35)


GOSPEL MEDITATION
Encourage Deeper Understanding of Scripture

“You cannot see the forest for the trees” is a widely known saying that can bring wisdom to our understanding of our journey. Often, our sight becomes limited to what is immediately before us. We lose touch with lessons and experiences from the past and promises and hope for the future. As human beings, we have the privilege of being able to choose things. What I like and don’t like, want, and don’t want can be major preoccupations of our minds and hearts. Our preferences and desires begin to define us more than the simple fact of our being. Who we are matters more than what we are or what we have. If we don’t move beyond the external and superficial stuff to what really is of essence, we risk becoming very unsettled, disoriented, angry, and unhappy. We fail to see the bigger picture of hope and promise that lies ahead and the Divine Presence that has sustained and carried us before.

We like it when the “now” time of our lives satisfy us. Even the people who witnessed Jesus feed the five thousand got confused and distracted. It felt good when thousands of people were able to eat. They wanted to know what they could do to get this to happen again! But Jesus quickly reminds them that this is not the point of this sign. As much as the now time of our lives is of concern, it is not what is ultimately important. We need to learn the difference between being and doing, drawing more strength from who we are and who God is rather than what is happening around us and the choices we can make. Jesus is the true bread that came down from heaven. Jesus is the very incarnate presence of God who sustains life and assures us that we will not perish. This is not easy to understand and feel. We have to practice being in the presence of ourselves, others, creation, and God. We are brought to a holy place when we encounter the sacredness of being. This is real prayer.

Then, we learn to trust. It is when we cease trusting that we start to become afraid, uncertain, apprehensive, and doubtful, and overly self-concerned. We even start to grumble. God has our back. That is the essential powerful message of the living bread come down from heaven. God, who is alpha is also omega, the beginning and the end, and has everything in between in his care as well. A woman once remarked that her most powerful God moment happened when she and her husband cuddled with their new baby for a time. Without exchanging words and using only the affection communicated through sight and touch, they rested in being with each other. This brought them to the sacred, where they realized that a greater Being was with them. It was real. They knew that they were part of something bigger, intimate, and profound. When we rest in the Living Source of life, we will find that our souls are no longer hungry or thirsty.
The first reading, Ex 16:2 - 4, 12 - 15

It was not long after the exodus had begun that the grumbling of the people against Yahweh began (Ex 16). The gravity of the complaint lies in its pitting life under the Pharaoh against life in the desert with Yahweh (v3). The pre-Sinai response of Yahweh is one of unquestioning acquiescence (v4); after the Sinai covenant, punishment for such misconduct comes more to the fore (Num 11:1 - 6, 31 - 34).

Bread from heaven (v4): The basic idea was that of heavenly bread, a divine gift, poetically described as a rainfall of bread. The instructions on collecting the manna (v4) are given in considerable detail (vv16 - 30), with the limitation to the quota of a single day established to avoid greed and accent providence.

The provision of food comes in two forms. The small quail migrate to Sinai and Palestine in the spring in large numbers. Manna, the bedouin man, is a sweet-tasting substance found on the tamarisk tree, probably the excretion of plant lice. Both phenomena, natural in themselves, are miraculously provided for the Israelites on their journey.

The second reading, Eph 4:17, 20 - 24

In the selections from Ephesians which we have read on these past two Sundays, St. Paul showed us how God effected a new unity of His once separated peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, by making both Christians. In today’s second reading, St. Paul encourages the Jewish and Gentile Christians to live out the consequences of their unification, by treating each other like members of one family. He also demands of the Gentile Christians of Ephesus radical changes from their pre-Christian way of life. They must a) “put away the old self of their former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires,” b) “be renewed in the spirit of their minds,” and c) “put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.” They must put away the old pagan life and put on the new Christian life, just as the catechumens divested themselves of their outer garments to go down into the Baptismal waters and, after emerging, were clothed in Baptismal robes. Here, St. Paul is challenging all baptized believers to personal holiness.

Gospel Insights

“The source and summit of the Christian Life:” The emphasis in this segment of the Bread of Life Discourse is placed on the Faith-acceptance of the teaching of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is nourishment first of all as One who offers us the life-giving words of God about the meaning of our lives. Moreover, this Divine message, if it is to nourish for Eternal Life, must be accepted in a way that leads us from self-centeredness to unselfish love and sacrifice for others. It is for this reason that Jesus states, “I AM the Bread of Life” (Jn 6:35) for the one who “comes” to Him and “believes” in Him. In fact, the Eucharist is not a kind of “static” presence of Christ, but the living and perfect Self-offering of Christ to His Father, carried out by His giving Himself to us and for us. We believe that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian Life” (Lumen Gentium), because it contains the whole spiritual good of the Church; that is, Jesus Christ Who lived, died, and rose again to bring us salvation, strengthens and makes holy our relationship with our fellow-Christians, nourishes us with the transforming power of grace, and prepares us for the future glory of God’s Heavenly Wedding Banquet.

Multiply good works like the loaves and fishes, (Pope Francis July 26, 2015) “Jesus satisfies not only material hunger, but the most profound of hungers, the hunger for meaning in life, the hunger for God. In the face of suffering, loneliness, poverty and difficulties of so many people, what can we do? Complaining, does not solve anything, but we can offer what little we have. We certainly have a few hours of time, some talent, some expertise. ... Who among us, does not have his or her “five loaves and two fish”? If we are willing to put them in the hands of the Lord, we will bring a little more love into the world, a bit more love, peace, justice, and joy. God is able to multiply our small gestures of solidarity and make us partakers of His gift.”
Demand for a sign from Heaven:

In reply to Jesus’ claim that He is the Messiah sent from Heaven to give eternal life to those who believe in Him, the Jews demand a sign from Heaven. Moses, they say, gave a Heavenly sign to their ancestors in the manna rained down on them from Heaven. The Jewish rabbis taught that the Messiah would repeat the miracle of manna and the prophet Jeremiah would reappear and unearth the Ark of the Covenant from its hidden place to show the Jews the original manna kept in the Ark.

Jesus corrects their understanding of Ex 16:15 by stating that it was not Moses but God, Jesus’ Father, Who gave, and continues to give, bread from Heaven. Jesus is apparently speaking to two groups: those who witnessed the miracle of the loaves (last Sunday’s Gospel), and those who have not seen the miracle but have heard about it and want to see a similar sign as proof. Jesus tells the former group that there is something much deeper in this event than “perishable food” being multiplied; the real “food” is Jesus’ own Body, later to be offered on the cross and glorified by Resurrection, and the word of God Jesus proclaims, its power and authority manifested in the miracles of the loaves. Jesus reminds the latter group who seek a sign as the Israelites sought a sign from Moses, that it was not Moses who fed them in the desert, but God working through Moses Who provided food for them there in the form of manna. The same God has given His people New Bread for the New Covenant — the Risen Christ.

The crowd’s final request remains on a non-faith level: “Give us this bread” (v34). This request for an uninterrupted supply of bread is full of Johannine faith possibilities Those who accept the truth of his revelation will never again suffer spiritual hunger or thirst (v35). The bread here is not eucharistic but refers to Jesus himself and his divine teaching.

QUIZ TIME

1. Why did the people of Israel complain to Moses and Aaron?
   a. They were hot in the desert
   b. They did not have food
   c. Their bread had gone stale
   d. They had been happy in Egypt

2. What did God send to the Israelites to eat?
   a. Bread from heaven
   b. Lamb chops
   c. A hidden store of vegetables
   d. Nothing

3. What does Paul tell the people they must do, in the second reading?
   a. Live a new way of life
   b. Return to Egypt
   c. Act like Gentiles
   d. Shave their beards

4. What did the people ask Jesus for?
   a. Money
   b. Sheep
   c. Bread from heaven
   d. A sign

5. What does Jesus say is the true bread from heaven?
   a. Himself
   b. Quail
   c. Frost in the desert
   d. Water and wine

QUIZ ANSWERS
1. b, 2. a, 3. a, 4. d, 5. a

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