

## **EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: John 6:24-35*

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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. or it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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." 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 be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

### **REFLECTION 1:                      LOOKING BEYOND THE SIGN**

Did you ever skip a few lines in a book? In most cases especially in novels it doesn't really matter as we get the gist of the story from the preceding narrative. So, did you notice something about today's Gospel? Well, the compiler of the Lectionary for today's mass has skipped the seven verses that link last Sunday's Gospel and today's from the 6th Chapter of St. John's Gospel (Vs. 16-23). So I would like to link up the message of these missing verses to where the Gospel begins today. It relates that after Jesus had fed the 5,000, there was a move on behalf of the crowds to make Jesus their king, even by force if necessary. So Jesus escaped by going off into the hills by himself. Then when evening came, the disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat and went back across the lake on their own towards the town of Capernaum. By now a strong wind was blowing, stirring up the waters of the lake. The disciples had rowed about three or four miles when they saw a human form walking on the waters approaching their boat. The disciples were terrified, imagining that they had seen a ghost. 'Don't be afraid' Jesus told them, 'it is I'. The disciples then took Jesus on board and immediately they reached the land to which they were heading. And this is the spot where today's Gospel begins – the synagogue at Capernaum.

I believe that these missing verses are important when we come to reflect on the bread of life that animates today's Gospel – the Eucharist. Notice for instance that Jesus walked on the water overcoming the laws of nature and cancelled the time it took to complete the journey. These were miraculous gestures that demonstrated to his disciples and us, that Jesus, through his eucharistic presence, was not subject to the laws of gravity or the restrictions of time. Just as Jesus had fed the 5,000 in the desert, so also could he nourish with his presence, the faithful throughout the world as the new Eucharistic Prayer No. 3, expresses it ... 'so that from the rising of the sun to its setting a pure sacrifice may be offered in his name'.

The gift that Jesus gives us is the gift of himself, his 'flesh for the life of the world' and in his bounty he is not subject to space or time. We are invited to acknowledge that gift by looking beyond the sign of bread to see and believe in the One who designed that sign to offer his very self for our salvation. Jesus would say to those gathered at Capernaum, as he says to us all at each eucharistic assembly – 'Look

beyond the bread, and see beyond your human need for food and immerse yourselves into the real food that I have to offer – the Bread of Life'. Jesus could see beyond the bread he took, blessed and broke, when he gave his life for the forgiveness of sinners. He could see beyond his crucifixion to those many gatherings of the people of God, assembled to remember him, at this time and place.

Mother Teresa could look beyond the degradation of India's poor and recognise in them the face of Jesus. Gandhi and John Paul II could look into the faces of their assassins and see in each a brother whom they could forgive. If we are to accept the bread that God gives to us in Jesus, it is essential for us to see where this sign is pointing. Learning to 'look beyond' in this way remains the challenge of the Eucharist in our times.