

Homily of Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54; Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35

While the Israelites were journeying through the desert to the Promised Land, God provided them with food for their soul and food for their body. God gave them his commandments as food for their soul. And as we read in today's first reading, God gave them manna and quail as food for their body. Since the human body is made of material and spiritual components, God warned the Israelites, "It is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3). The same warning is for us today.

In last Sunday's gospel reading, Jesus, miraculously, fed five thousand men. The men were so excited that they wanted to carry Jesus off to make him king, but Jesus knowing their frivolous intention withdrew from them (John 6:15). Jesus' action is a message for those who cheat and kill others in order to acquire power or ascend to positions. In today's gospel, the crowd did not relent. They searched for Jesus and found him across the sea. That became a teachable moment with which Jesus confront the restive crowd, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. 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 set his seal" (John 6:26-27). Unfortunately, many people who claim to be Christians do not seek for Jesus as the sign that leads to righteousness and salvation. They look for him to be filled with 'miraculous loaves.' This, perhaps, explains why 'miracle centers' and 'prosperity gospel churches' are in vogue.

Our earthly life's journey is like the Israelites' journey through the desert. God provides us earthly food for our physical sustenance. For our spiritual life and nourishment, God provides us the "Bread of God;" the Word made Flesh, Jesus Christ.

The readings help us to understand that no matter the possessions we accumulate; we will never be satisfied if Jesus is not at the center of our life. Grumbling like the Israelites is a sign that Jesus is absent, and a sign of insatiable desire. But if Jesus is at the center of our life, we are satisfied with what God provides for us. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst" (John 6:35). St. Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). St. Paul warns us in the second reading that without Jesus our desires are futile and deceitful.

When we sing the song, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand," we are, indeed, affirming the words of Jesus in today's gospel, "For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." This means that in Jesus, we are secure. Without Jesus, we fall apart. Jesus reminds us in John 15:5, "For without me you can do nothing."

One would have imagined that considering the world's scientific and technological advancement, the world would be happy and peaceful. But, since the world is moving farther and farther away from God, there is so much anger and crisis everywhere. Scripture says, "For the Lord has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land: There is no fidelity, no loyalty, no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore, the land dries up, and everything that dwells in it languishes" (Hosea 4:1-3). God laments through Prophet Jeremiah, "Two evils my people have done: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). Surely, these passages describe the distressed situation in almost everywhere.

In Ephesians 2:14 St. Paul says that nothing else is our peace but Jesus Christ. Blaise Pascal is quoted to have said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each person which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."

Jesus commands us in the gospel, "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." Unfortunately, there are people who acquire wealth, position, and power through sinful means. Such people do not care about the food that endures for eternal life. They do not care about integrity, legitimacy, and legacy. They live by bread alone and work only for food that perishes. For us, it is not so. We pray that by the power and seal of Jesus, our work brings us enduring reward here on earth, and eternal reward in heaven. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP