

Homily of Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 the 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 and misguided intention withdrew from them (John 6:15). Jesus' action is a message for those who climb into positions of power with mischievous motives and those who cheat and kill their fellow human beings in order to acquire positions of power.

In today's gospel, the crowd did not relent. They searched for Jesus and found him across the sea. That became a teaching moment through which Jesus confronted 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" (John 6:26). Unfortunately, many people who claim to be Christians do not seek Jesus as the sign that leads to righteousness and salvation. They seek him to be filled with 'miraculous loaves.' This, perhaps, explains why miracle centers and prosperity churches spring up everywhere. Regrettably, 'miracle chasers' have little or nothing to show for their years of miracle chasing from place to place and up and down wherever it is rumored that 'it is happening.' Instead, some of the 'miracle chasers' tell blood chilling experiences and stories.

Our earthly life's journey is like the Israelites' journey through the desert. We need more than physical food and physical drinks. Jesus commands us in today's gospel, "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life" (John 6:27). For our spiritual life and nourishment, God gives us the "Bread of God," the Word made Flesh, Jesus Christ; the way, the truth, and the life (John 4:16). That is why Jesus says in today's gospel, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst" (John 6:35).

The readings help us to understand that no matter our possessions and positions, we are empty if our spiritual life is famished. Blaise Pascal says, "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."

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 distress, sadness, restiveness, fear, anger, quarrel, bitterness, enmity, crisis, and violence everywhere. Why? 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).

Sometimes, even among Christian families and communities, and among the gathering of God's children, there is so much distress, sadness, restiveness, fear, anger, quarrel, bitterness, enmity, crisis, and violence. The reason is as the Lord speaks through Prophet Isaiah, "This people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).

Anyone whose heart is close to God cannot dwell in bitterness, hate, and destruction, or dwell in futile and deceitful desires, as St. Paul warns in the second reading (Ephesians 4:17). This is what St. John means when he writes, "No one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God" (1 John 3:9). What is in me? Is it the good of seed love, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit sown by Jesus? He is the one who sows good seed (Matthew 13:37). Or, is it the weeds of distress, sadness, restiveness, fear, anger, quarrel, bitterness, enmity, crisis, violence, and destruction sown by the Evil One and his agents? (Matthew 13:28).

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "For on him the Father, God, has set his seal" (John 6:27). We pray that through Jesus, may God set his seal of healing and deliverance on us. Through Jesus, may God set his seal of protection and victory on us. May God seal us with the Precious Blood of the Lamb from all enemy weeds and forces and from all dangers. Amen and amen.

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