

Everlasting Bread

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

John 6:24-35

We continue the journey with Jesus: chapter 6 of John's gospel.

You may (hopefully) recall last week's gospel:

Jesus miraculously feeds a multitude.

The crowd, thrilled at having full stomachs, wants to make Jesus king—so to ensure having full stomachs every day thereafter.

Jesus, so not to be enthroned as a king he is not,
withdraws to the mountain, alone.

Later that evening, Jesus walks on the water to His disciples.

What the heck! Let us have some fun!

This is not a mini Cirque du Soleil, however. This is an exercise in trust.

They are fearful.

"It is I. Do not be afraid", Jesus says to them.

In the process, Jesus prepares them for what follows:

"disconcerting" revelation.

We begin here what is traditionally called "Discourse on the bread of life".

It is more than a discourse; it is an *encounter*.

With Jesus, it is *always* an encounter.

This is an encounter with Jesus as Bread of Life.

The crowd goes in search of Jesus.

I would have too—with the "picnic from heaven"!

They find Jesus across the sea on which he had walked.

Oddly, instead of greeting them, thanking them for the effort at finding Him, Jesus challenges them: their motives are not pure, i.e. are selfish.

"You have come because you want more food." *Nailed!*

Notice, however, how Jesus opens his statement: "Amen, amen."

When Jesus says "amen, amen", He appeals to faith.

It is a way of saying, "Open your hearts in faith to what I am to reveal."

Jesus then leads them on a little journey meant to open their hearts to Him.

He tells them that the food they want is insufficient.

They are to "work" for the food that never perishes

(there is no such thing humanly speaking!—except maybe SPAM).

Jesus promises such food, He on whom God has set His seal, He reassures.

The successful opening of their hearts is expressed in a question.

They ask, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?”
Jesus tells them that all they must do, all *we* must do is *believe*,
which He later suggests translates into “coming to Him”.
Notice how Jesus then playfully leads the crowd further,
further in their thirst for and encounter with Him.
He criticizes them for not seeking Him because of signs.
Then they ask for a sign, and He does not give one!
Instead of a sign, He reveals Himself as the bread of life.
He tells them that the manna in the desert was actually given by the Father,
and there is One who is the bread of the Father, who comes to give life.
In their bewilderment and awe and desire they ask for this bread,
simply calling Jesus “sir”, as if to express being overwhelmed.
“I am the bread of life...”

What is Jesus saying?
What does this mean for us?
Jesus wants to lead us to an experience of Him as bread of life.
Bread of life? Why this metaphor?
How can God be bread?
God, Jesus is *like* bread.
Bread is the most basic staple,
food that nourishes everyone, food that everyone thus *needs*.
Jesus is revealing how our hearts need Him
if they are to be fully alive, fully satisfied: *bread of life*.
Jesus comes to share Himself with us—*fully*.
You will notice how once consumed, there is no more bread.
It has “given” everything.
Jesus *is* the bread of life, and he *gives* the bread of life: the Eucharist.
All we must do is receive, for it is, *He* is a gratuitous gift.
We receive in and with faith—hence Jesus’ appeal to faith:
“Believe in the one he sent.”
Faith does not mean that we passively ride the wave.
There is an effort to be made.
We must *want* to believe, we must *choose* to exercise the gift of faith.
We must daily say “yes”,
for the gift of faith in us does not infringe upon our freedom.

And so, it is amazing when one thinks about it:
the Father gives us everything,
and we are given a gift that enables us to receive it: faith.
Faith enables us to receive God, Jesus, bread of life.
The “amen” we say before Communion
opens us to an encounter with the Bread of Life,
to Jesus whom comes to us so that we come to Him and never hunger again.
Many of you are familiar with the great quote from Saint Augustine:
“Our hearts are restless Lord until they rest in you.”

Come to Him.
Believe.
He will accomplish the wondrous works of God.
He will pour forth all His love.
He gives Himself to us in the silence of love in the Eucharist.
Our hearts will be quenched and satisfied.
Our hearts will rest...