

GOSPEL

John 6:24-35

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered:

‘I tell you most solemnly,
you are not looking for me
because you have seen the signs
but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat.
Do not work for food that cannot last,
but work for food that endures to eternal life,
the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you,
for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.’

Then they said to him, ‘What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?’ Jesus gave them this answer, ‘This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent.’ So they said, ‘What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’

Jesus answered:

‘I tell you most solemnly,
it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven,
it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven,
the true bread;
for the bread of God
is that which comes down from heaven
and gives life to the world.’

‘Sir,’ they said ‘give us that bread always.’ Jesus answered:

‘I am the bread of life.
He who comes to me will never be hungry;
he who believes in me will never thirst.’

A REFLECTION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

5 August 2012

The Reading of the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel continues in the Liturgy of the Word of this Sunday. We are in the synagogue of Capharnaum where Jesus was giving his well-known discourse after the multiplication of the loaves. The people had sought to make him king but Jesus had withdrawn, first, to the mountain with God, with the Father, and then to Capharnaum. Since they could not see him, they began to look for him, they boarded the boats in order to cross the lake to the other shore and had found him at last. However, Jesus was well aware of the reason for this great enthusiasm in following him and he says so, even clearly: “you seek me, not because you saw signs, [because you were deeply impressed] but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (v. 26).

Jesus wants to help the people go beyond the immediate satisfaction — albeit important — of their own material needs. He wants to open them to a horizon of existence that does not consist merely of the daily concerns of eating, of being clothed, of a career. Jesus speaks of a food that does not perish, which it is important to seek and to receive. He says: “do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you” (v. 27).

The crowd does not understand, it believes that Jesus is asking for the observance of precepts in order to obtain the continuation of that miracle, and asks: “what must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (v. 28). Jesus’ answer is unequivocal: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (v. 29). The centre of existence — which is what gives meaning and certain hope in the all too often difficult journey of life — is faith in Jesus, it is the encounter with Christ.

We too ask: “what must we do to have eternal life?”. And Jesus says: “believe in me”. Faith is the fundamental thing. It is not a matter here of following an idea or a project, but of encountering Jesus as a living Person, of letting ourselves be totally involved by him and by his Gospel. Jesus invites us not to stop

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at the purely human horizon and to open ourselves to the horizon of God, to the horizon of faith. He demands a single act: to accept God's plan, namely, to "believe in him whom he has sent" (v. 29).

Moses had given Israel manna, the bread from heaven with which God himself had nourished his people. Jesus does not give some thing, he gives himself: he is the "true bread that which comes down from heaven". He is the living Word of the Father; in the encounter with him we meet the living God.

"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (v. 28), the crowd asks, ready to act in order to perpetuate the miracle of the loaves. But Jesus, the true bread of life that satisfies our hunger for meaning and for truth, cannot be "earned" with human work; he comes to us only as a gift of God's love, as a work of God to be asked for and received.

Dear friends, on days that are busy and full of problems, but also on days of rest and relaxation, the Lord asks us not to forget that if it is necessary to be concerned about material bread and to replenish our strength, it is even more fundamental to develop our relationship with him, to reinforce our faith in the One who is the "bread of life" which satisfies our desire for truth and love. May the Virgin Mary, on the day on which we recall the dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome, sustain us on our journey of faith.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Why might we be so easily "concerned with material bread" and neglect "to develop our relationship with [Jesus]"?



Heart: What causes us to stop at the "human horizon" and not go on to "the horizon of God, to the horizon of faith"?



Hands: What are some practices we might put in place to address, at least with better balance, the dual needs of our humanity – material and spiritual goods?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.