

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

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The “Bread of Life” Discourses (second of five)

Sources:

SCB: ([St Charles](#))

S: ([Sacerdos](#))

Augustine: (Augustine – [Tractate 25](#))

SH: ([David Scott & Scott Hahn](#))

S:

- **THEME OF THE READINGS** - The Father is the one who provides man with the food he needs for his life (*First Reading, Psalm, Gospel*). But like pagans, we live with empty minds (*Second Reading*) and are so taken up with filling our stomachs and the needs of this life that we fail to grasp the real meaning of his gifts or the incomparable worth of the bread of life who is Jesus himself (*Gospel*). Receiving this gift we become a new creation, with “a fresh, spiritual way of thinking” (*Second Reading*).

1st Reading - Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died at the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!"

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.

"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God."

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

SCB:

- The events recounted here take place in the Wilderness of Sin, an area just to the northwest of Mount Sinai. During their journey, God puts the Israelites to three tests to see if they will obey Him:
 - Marah (Exodus 15:22-27). Three days travel from the Red (Reed) Sea and no water had been found until they came to the waters of Marah (the name means “bitter”). Because the water is undrinkable, the people grumble to Moses who takes it up with God who shows him a piece of wood. When Moses throws the wood into the water, the water becomes sweet.
 - Manna & Quail (Exodus 16:1-36). This event occurs two and one-half months after leaving Egypt. This is what we will study today.
 - Water (Exodus 17:1-7). Now, instead of bitter water, they have no water at all. The people again protest to Moses and demand water, comparing their discomfort with the comfort they had enjoyed in Egypt. Moses talks with God, strikes the rock with his staff (the same one used to impress Pharaoh & part the sea) and water flows forth.
- The people complain against Moses and Aaron, but their ultimate complaint is against God. In Egypt, although slaves, they had plenty to eat. Pharaoh had provided for them in abundance and now they are starving.
- Psalm 78:17-31 tells us that the quail turned out to be poisonous, killing those who had craved them. The commentaries, in an effort to explain the miracle, tell us that quail fly south annually from their northern European and Scandinavian quarters in September and October to winter in Africa. In May and June they make the return trip. The migration usually follows the wind, but if the wind suddenly shifts, the entire flock may be forced to land where, because they are exhausted, they are easy to catch. This explanation doesn't tell us how they appeared daily for 40 years instead of just during the migration – a miracle has occurred.
- Again, the commentaries, in an effort to explain away the miracles, tell us that the manna is the honey-like droppings from the tamarisk tree. These droppings are secretions from two kinds of scale lice, which suck large quantities of liquid from the twigs in the spring to collect nitrogen for their grubs. It contains glucose and fructose but no protein. When it drops to the ground it becomes somewhat firm in the cool night air. It has a low melting point (~70oF) and thus must be gathered early before the sun causes it to melt. Today, Bedouins consider it a delicacy because of its sweet taste. Again, this does not explain the miracle as it occurred daily (except on the Sabbath, as a double portion was provided on Friday) for 40 years; not just in the spring. Also, this sustained about 1 million Israelites for 40 years. Another miracle has occurred. The responsorial psalm for today (Psalm 78) is about manna.

Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

What we have heard and know, and what our fathers have declared to us, we will declare to the generation to come the glorious deeds of the LORD and his strength and the wonders that he wrought.

He commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven; he rained manna upon them for food and gave them heavenly bread.

Man ate the bread of angels, food he sent them in abundance. And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountains his right hand had won.

2nd Reading - Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; that is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.

SCB:

- This week we hear Paul speak about interior renewal. Every Christian needs to lead a new life in Christ in order to contribute to the growth of the Body. This means one must shed the life of vanity and sin which one led before one's conversion and put on Christ, the new Man.
- This is the common Jewish view of pagans, they were empty-headed (Romans 1:21-23). The emptiness of their minds had led them away from God, the source of all truth. If the mind operates in a vacuum, the resulting knowledge produces nothing but illusion and deceit.
- The type of life they led when equipped only with the resources belonging to human nature as sons of Adam. Human weakness prompted countless moral failures that caused spiritual death (Colossians 3:9, Romans 8:13, Galatians 6:8).
- We are told to "put away the old self" and to "put on the new self." These words belong to a baptismal liturgy. The candidate removed his old clothes, went into the baptismal water, then put on new white clothing upon emerging; outward signs of an inner change: He had put aside his former life, washed away his sin, and put on Christ, beginning a new manner of life.
- The new clothing now being put on is the new way of life and conduct that flows from baptism.
- The "new self" is incorporation into Christ Himself, the new Adam, becoming what God had intended when God created him in His own image (Romans 6:3-11).

Gospel - John 6:24-35

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "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." So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*? So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father 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."

So 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 hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

SCB:

- In time we are one year prior to Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. There are three Passover periods mentioned in Holy Scripture; all of which appear in the Gospel of John:
 - John 2:13-12 – The cleansing of the temple immediately after the marriage feast at Cana.
 - John 6:4 – The feeding of the 5,000 which, along with Jesus' walking on water, immediately precede this bread of life discourse.
 - John 11:55 – Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection.
- Capernaum is a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The place known to be Jesus' center of activity in Galilee. Matthew 4:13 notes that He established a residence there. He began His public ministry there by teaching in the synagogue (Mark 1:21 & Luke 4:31). Since Jesus had fled to the mountain alone (last week, last verse) and the crowd knew that He had not departed with the Apostles (John 6:16), they looked for Him where they knew He maintained a home base.
- In the New Testament, the term "Rabbi" is used as a form of address rather than a title (such as "The Rabbi"). The term means "master" and was the way a student of the scribes would address his teacher. The use of this address to Jesus is significant because, even though they don't know precisely who He is, or what His mission is, they do recognize Him as a religious leader. Recall though that Jesus had fled after the feeding of the five thousand because He realized they wanted to make Him king.
- Jesus steers their attention to His true mission which is spiritual.

- In Hebrew, Greek and Latin the words are the same: “Amen, amen”. We normally end our prayers with “amen” but Jesus begins His statement in this manner. Amen means “truly”, “so be it”, “I do believe”. The doubled Amen is a solemn affirmation, an oath. When swearing an oath, the response was “Amen”. The faithful and true witness is Christ, the Amen (Revelation 3:14). Since two witnesses are required to sentence someone to death (Deuteronomy 17:6), Jesus is bearing the part of both witnesses and alerting them that what He is going to say has life and death consequences.
- They have not understood the true meaning of the signs but instead are now looking for a handout – free food (things of the body).
- Material food keeps us alive in this world, spiritual food sustains and develops supernatural life which will last forever; recall that the woman at the well in John 4:1-26 was promised living water and that she would never thirst. This spiritual food, only God can give us. Through God’s infinite love we are given, in the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus Himself as nourishment for our souls.
- “Son of Man” - Jesus’ favorite designation of Himself; a title which is never applied to him by the evangelists. This image draws upon Daniel 7:13-14; 8:17 where the son of man is prefigured as the messiah who is to usher in the final days, and also Genesis 2:7, the creation account, where in Hebrew *adam* means man and *adama* (*adamah*) means earth. Jesus is the new Adam, the one who doesn’t fall. The image may also reflect back to Ezekiel 37 where God addresses the prophet Ezekiel as “son of man” and uses him to preach to the dry bones which fill a valley and effect a resurrection (this is the inspirational source of the spiritual song “Dem Bones”). The Jews knew their Scriptures very well and would easily make the association between the title He gives Himself and the promises of a messiah, a prophet, and resurrection which are made in these passages. Jesus’ use of the term “Son of man” is a certain indication to his hearers that He claims to have been sent by God.
- Given firm and eternal authority (Nehemiah 9:38, Song of Songs 8:6). When a seal is impressed on wax, the wax receives the complete form of the seal. So it is that the Son received the entire form of the Father (Hebrews 1:3).
- They can’t do God’s work; their task is to believe in Him, and consequently in what He says, in faith (not because of the miracles He does but because of Who sent Him). He who comes from God speaks the words of God (John 3:31-34).
- Now the dialog between the crowd and Jesus is beginning to sound even more like the one with the woman at the well: She had asked if He was greater than Jacob (John 4:12) and here the people want to know if He can compare with Moses (Exodus 16:15). Moses gave food but it would perish, now Jesus promises food which remains forever.
- By using the term “my Father” He calls Himself the Son of God. He also reminds them that this promised gift is also from God the Father. Note the transition from past tense to present tense “Moses gave - my Father gives”.

- Although they now have a perception that He is speaking of non-material bread, and that He can give this bread, they do not yet understand that this bread is Himself.
- Like the “water of life” (John 4:10) it satisfies forever. Shifts emphasis from “bread of God” to “bread of life”; the gift of God is everlasting life. The bread of God gives life to the world.
- Jesus is the one who really meets all of man’s noblest aspirations and meets all of man’s needs.

Augustine:

- After the sacrament of the miracle, He introduces discourse, that, if possible, they who have been fed may be further fed, that He may with discourse fill their minds, whose bellies He filled with the loaves, provided they take in. And if they do not, let that be taken up which they do not receive, that the fragments may not be lost. Wherefore let Him speak, and let us hear.
- How many seek Jesus for no other object but that He may bestow on them a temporal benefit! One has a business on hand, he seeks the intercession of the clergy; another is oppressed by one more powerful than himself, he flies to the church. Another desires intervention in his behalf with one with whom he has little influence. One in this way, one in that, the church is daily filled with such people. Jesus is scarcely sought after for Jesus’ sake.
- In the same manner as it was said to that Samaritan woman: “If thou knewest who it is that asketh of thee drink, thou wouldest perhaps have asked of Him, and He would give thee living water.” When she said, “Whence hast thou, since thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep?” He answered the Samaritan woman: “If thou knewest who it is that asketh of thee drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would give thee water, whereof whoso drinketh shall thirst no more; for whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again.” And she was glad and would receive, as if no more to suffer thirst of body, being wearied with the labor of drawing water. And so, during a conversation of this kind, He comes to spiritual drink. Entirely in this manner also here.
- This Son of man is separated by a certain grace of the spirit; Son of man according to the flesh, taken out from the number of men: He is the Son of man. This Son of man is also the Son of God; this man is even God.
- The Word of God commends to our attention His own humility: the man acknowledged the glory of his Lord. And indeed, brethren, I think that this is just. He humbled Himself for us, let us glorify Him. For not for Himself is He Son of man, but for us. Therefore was He Son of man in that way, when “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” For to that end “God the Father sealed Him.” What is to seal, but to put some particular mark? To seal is to impress some mark which cannot be confounded with the rest. To seal is to put a mark on a thing. When thou puttest a mark on anything, thou doest so lest it might be confused with other things, and thou shouldst not be able to recognize it. “The

Father," then, "hath sealed Him." What is that, "hath sealed"? Bestowed on Him something peculiar, which puts Him out of comparison with all other men. For that reason it is said of Him, "God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." What is it then to seal, but to have Him excepted?

- For I am the Son of man in such manner as not to be one of you: I am Son of man in such manner that God the Father sealed me. What does that mean, He "sealed me"? Gave me something peculiarly my own, that I should not be confounded with mankind, but that mankind should be delivered by me.
- But the Lord Jesus declared Himself to be such an one, that He was superior to Moses. For Moses dared not say of himself that he gave, "not the meat which perisheth, but that which endureth to eternal life." Jesus promised something greater than Moses gave. By Moses indeed was promised a kingdom, and a land flowing with milk and honey, temporal peace, abundance of children, health of body, and all other things, temporal goods indeed, yet in figure spiritual; because in the Old Testament they were promised to the old man. They considered therefore the things promised by Moses, and they considered the things promised by Christ. The former promised a full belly on the earth, but of the meat which perisheth; the latter promised, "not the meat which perisheth, but that which endureth unto eternal life." They gave attention to Him that promised the more, but just as if they did not yet see Him do greater things. They considered therefore what sort of works Moses had done, and they wished yet some greater works to be done by Him who promised them such great things.
- For by both is signified that eternal sufficiency in which there is no want.