

## 01 August 2021—The 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:24-35 (Proper 13)

I am giving you an assignment this week: read John 6. This chapter is well worth repeated visits. Today's passage is after the feeding of the 5000. Jesus now challenges them to receive deeper nourishment: *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*

Jesus makes his meaning explicit: *It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven—referring to God's miraculous feeding of the Israelites after their escape from Egypt in Exodus 16—but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven...I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

Jesus distinguishes three "breads": ordinary bread that nourishes the body; miraculous ordinary bread—the wilderness manna and the bread on the hillside, that also nourishes body; the third kind is what Jesus calls the *bread of life* that, he says, gives *life to the world*, a spiritual food that fully nourishes, and keeps on nourishing into eternity.

We understand ordinary bread and our bodies need of it. The third kind is more challenging, yet most crucial to our lives individually and corporately. In our day people say they are 'spiritual' but not religious, not interested in so-called 'institutional religion.' Some simply dismiss Christianity as irrelevant. Often, we want to blame such attitudes on secularism, capitalism, aggressive atheism, whatever. Perhaps the answer is more disturbing and much closer to home. If Jesus' followers are not spiritually robust and healthy, having received full nourishment, and sharing such nourishment with others, why would others be interested? Would we seriously take a recommendation for a fine dining steakhouse from someone who only eats junk food?!

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century founder of the L'Arche communities for the severely handicapped, Jean Vanier, wrote: *We do not possess life. We receive life in our fragile bodies. And this life grows, develops, deepens as long as we are nourished. Without food, we wither and die. What is true of our physical side is also true of our life in the Spirit. We need to be nourished.*

A crucial truth about nourishment, whether physical or spiritual is this: being fed yesterday was good for yesterday; today we require more food; nourishment is about what we receive today. Just as with food for our bodies, spiritual nourishment is best through several meals every day. How does Jesus nourish us? (Not an exhaustive list)

1) We begin with the daily desire for true nourishment, not junk food. You know the difference. This is as true for our spirits as for our bodies.

2) We are nourished through daily prayer grounded in the Scriptures and the Church's tradition. We have the Book of Common Prayer; indeed, there are websites that provide everything needed for each day's prayer with just a few clicks. Two crucial pieces of advice about prayer: continually ask the Holy Spirit, 'teach me to pray;' and, persevere—pay no attention to your emotions.

3) Do not miss Sunday worship except for illness or an emergency.

4) Be fed through active participation in Christian Education, Bible Study, spiritual reading, and other avenues, etc. This is best with a group; if need be, do it online.

5) Make commitment to your parish a top priority: be part of, get involved, give freely of your time, talent and treasure. The Church is not a flower shop festooned with cut flowers for mere adornment, that will wither and die. This is a greenhouse, our primary context for continuing growth in Christ.

6) Practice mercy and loving-kindness daily in every relationship and environment. This may be as simple as a kind word to a harried store clerk or giving a few dollars to a homeless person.

7) Never despair, give up or give in. When you fail, turn to the source of nourishment. Our failures only inhibit us, never God. As we surrender failures and fumbles to God we grow in grace and new life.

Most of us are not hungry or thirsty; we have full refrigerators and pantries, well-stocked stores. A similar situation applies to spiritual nourishment: we have a superabundance of accessible resources. Unlike past generations it is not a question of availability but of desire: do you want to be fed? In Psalm 81:10 God says, *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and said, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it."* Jesus promises all the nourishment you need for eternal life, but you and I must seek it, receive it, and consume it. Open your mouth wide! Amen.