

18th Sunday
8/4/2024

NOT SOMETHING BUT SOMEONE

Over the last few years, time permitting, I have developed a hobby of cooking. It can be a rewarding, sometimes disappointing but also enjoyable pastime, particularly when I have fed others around my table. Food provides an essential service, allowing people to eat and to live and allows the opportunity to share not only food, but life. Yet it remains earthly food or as Jesus says in the gospel, *food that perishes*.

Last week we heard of Jesus feeding thousands of people. This week they are following after him. The people find Jesus and ask him he got there but Jesus promptly tells them that they came because they liked the idea of being fed. To put it more bluntly, they found the gravy train and they wanted to get on board. Jesus distinguishes between food that perishes and that endures for eternal life. Yes, we need that earthly food that sustains our earthly life and both that food and that life are gifts from God. But there is another category of food, *food that endures for eternal life*. That food is not something but someone—It is Jesus and the door to that food is faith.

As he does so often elsewhere, Jesus speaks about the importance of faith. Faith is both a gift and a decision. It's a gift because to be able to believe comes from God but it's also a decision that we make. Faith also involves an element of risk and trust, something that may lead us in surprising ways to some surprising places.—St. John Henry Newman spoke beautifully about this adventure. He said:

Our duty as Christians lies in making ventures for eternal life without the absolute certainty of success....it is a strange venture which has nothing in it of fear, risk...anxiety, uncertainty...our duty lies in risking upon Christ's word...and doing so in a noble, generous way, not indeed rashly or lightly, still without knowing accurately what we are doing...in all respects...trusting in Him.

Faith is centered around a mystery, not a problem but a mystery that we grow into and which can deepen in our lives. However, it is still something that always involves

more, that which goes beyond definitions. If you understand everything, you could worship a logic book. There is always something more to a mystery. In the early Church St. Ambrose had a wonderful image of faith, calling it an invisible fire.

Our faith reaches a highpoint in the celebration of the Eucharist where we enter into and share the one sacrifice Jesus made of himself through his Paschal Mystery—the movement from life through death into new life that Jesus pioneers and in which we all follow. Simply put, love is self-gift. When we love, make a sincere gift of ourselves, and the deeper the self-gift, the deeper the love. Or as St. John phrases it later, by his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus would, *show the depth of his love*, making a sincere gift of himself to the Father and making a sincere gift of himself to us.

The manna that the Israelites received in the desert was considered bread from heaven and we see that as an anticipation of the gift Jesus would make of himself. *My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.* Again, that true bread is not something but someone—it's Jesus. Here in the Eucharist, Jesus feeds us with his very self. He seeks to be united to us, to be in communion with us. He makes a sincere gift of himself to us in love and invites us to do the same.

Jesus gives us his body, blood, soul and divinity, he gives it to us under the form of bread and wine. I don't know about you but I'm grateful that he shares his body and blood in this way. You have to admit, it's much more palatable. As I tell our First Communicants, Jesus doesn't just want to be around you, or be next to you, Jesus wants to dwell within you, within us and that's what he seeks to do when we share in the sacrifice of the Mass and worthily receive him.

Just as it is possible for our faith to grow, so too, it's possible for our faith to lessen. It requires both God's grace and effort on our part. To nurture a plant, raise a child, stay in love, succeed in just about anything, requires effort but we have many tools to help us grow in faith. Some of these are the following:

We have prayer, which is simply lifting our hearts and minds to God in so many different ways. We're all called to a life of daily prayer, always in harmony with our state in life. Each person's prayer life will look different but everyone is called to it.

We have the Bible, God's word to us to accompany us, comfort us and challenge us. We also have a magnificent, beautiful, two millennia old patrimony of spirituality, art, music and literature. If you love someone, you want to know more about that person, so too, with Jesus.

We have the saints who inspire with their example and assist us with their prayers.

We have each other. We don't journey to God by ourselves. We journey to God together, as members of the Body of Christ, strengthening, encouraging, helping and loving each other.

We have the sacraments, especially Reconciliation where we meet God's merciful love and are called to take the better road that God offers to us.

And we have the Eucharist. If you love someone, you want to spend time with that person, and that's what we do most importantly at Mass but also with visits to church and with time spent in Eucharistic Adoration as we learn to see Jesus in others, especially in those who are in need.

Earthly food is good, a gift, something essential but it's perishable. The true bread from heaven, is Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life and what it offers is something not perishable but eternal—eternal life. With lives of intentional faith, where that invisible fire of faith burns deeply within us, together, may we embrace that Living Bread that isn't something but someone.