

Fr James' homily for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021



First Reading: Exodus 16:2-25
Second Reading: Letter of the Ephesians 4: 17-24
Gospel: John 6:24-35

We continue to hear the Gospel of St John, as flagged up last Sunday, and the reading of Chapter 6 and within it a profound meditation on the meaning of the Holy Eucharist...but from that a profound meditation also on Christian discipleship. Today too is the last time I will be posting this homily online as a resource during “Covid times.” The idea, back in March 2020, was to give some aid to praying and worshipping in isolation. Now it is time to emphasise a return to gathered worship, and the scriptures today are wonderful for that.

Our bishops are leading us to renew our understanding of Sunday, “The Day of the Lord.” There are two things I want to highlight in that. First, that our reverence, or not, for Sunday points to where our centre of gravity is. We are, all of us, always in need of what St Paul describes today as “a spiritual revolution” that places God and his invitation for us to share his life continually anew at the centre of who we are.

Inevitably it is part of fallen human nature to have to struggle with this, to fall away and to develop a sense of entitlement with God. “What sign will you give us to show us that we should believe in you?” the people say to Jesus AFTER the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves that we heard us last Sunday.

In a way the story of the Exodus is also an allegory, a spiritual description if you will, of how sin works to drag us down and take away our will to put God at the centre, as our centre of gravity. Moses was to lead the people from slavery. They were free, but not yet free. They longed for their slavery, to be back in Egypt where at least they got something to eat. How like us in our struggles, or not, to be converted. Talk to anyone who wrestles with addiction or who has done a 12 step programme. Addicted to alcohol, to pornography, whatever it is, we “look back” to a way of life that at least had some familiarity or comfort, even though it brought slavery with it. In this struggle God wills to sustain them. Putting our need to worship at the centre of the beginning of the week is a sign - but more than that it is a weapon - to help us look only forward.

The second thing I want to highlight is the very nature of Jesus, as he explicitly call himself “the Bread of Life.” The Manna from heaven, the living bread, is not a symbol that we are in touch with. Jesus’ first hearers were. There is something very edgy, very relevant about the bread from heaven. It came in the Exodus when the

people complained. Jesus tells them he will lead them as a new Moses, to a definitive freedom, if they will follow. The goal of our life, as it is the meaning of eternity, is to be centred on Jesus in all things, in every aspect of life to know he is the source of all meaning, fulfillment and happiness, to give away our life to him. The miracle of Holy Communion - in the reception of Holy Communion, or in the wonder of the presence of the Tabernacle in church, or in our refraining from receiving Holy Communion as appropriate is the awesome centre of this truth about Jesus.

All the church is asking for the prayers of Blessed Carlo Acutis these days, and Carlo put the mystery of the “bread from heaven” at the centre of his life and witness. He bowed down before it not least in his teenage curiosity to study miracles of the Eucharist. A renewal of our reverence for the Bread of Life is also a constant need for disciples of the Lord, of becoming “new” as St Paul says. Too soon we start to think of Holy Communion as a right, an expectation, and we can be so casual about it, in lots of ways.

The miracle of the Eucharist, of the living bread from heaven, who is Jesus, is to us both a constant challenge, as Jesus challenges his hearers, as Moses challenged the people in the desert, and it is the most sublime assistance, aid and nourishment. Coming out of Covid times, let us reverence this wonder all the more and afresh. Remember the famous image St John Vianney gives us of the man who sat staring at the Tabernacle in his church: “I look at him and he looks at me” the man says. The Living Bread teaches us that we are not the centre of the universe, he is, and when we learn that, we are free. Learning it, however, is tricky!

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday.

I hope that over the course of the last 18 months even one sentence from one of these online homilies may have helped you in the life of conversion to the Gospel. Please help your parish in every way, especially in prayer, to return to the normal worship of the church, but not simply to return to how it was, but to know it in a new way. Those who are constantly housebound, remember what I always tell you - your life of prayer in one sort of isolation, is uniquely valuable to God, and puts you at the heart of the gathered worshippers.