

## Eighteen Sunday of Ordinary Time

### Gospel Reading

5th August 2018

#### **John 6: 24-35**

Jesus teaches the crowds that he is the “bread of life.”

### **Background on the Gospel Reading**

This Sunday we continue to read from the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, but not continuously. Our Lectionary omits John’s report of Jesus’ walking on water. This event is reported much less dramatically in John’s Gospel than in the Synoptic Gospels. After the feeding of the multitudes, the disciples leave in a boat and Jesus follows them.

The disciples are said to be terrified by what they see. Jesus reassures them and rejoins them. In today’s Gospel, we learn that the crowd has noticed the departure of Jesus and his disciples and so seeks them out in Capernaum. In the dialogue that follows between Jesus and the crowds, Jesus unfolds for us the gift of himself that that he gives in the Eucharist.

In today’s Gospel, there are four exchanges between Jesus and the crowd. In the first, the crowd, having followed Jesus to Capernaum, asks a very matter of fact question: “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus replies by naming their motivation in pursuing him. They have been fed. Jesus acknowledges this, yet challenges them to see beyond the fulfillment of their material needs. The crowds have followed Jesus because they have been fed. They ought to be seeking out Jesus because he can give them eternal life.

As the second dialogue begins, it seems that the crowd might be on their way to accepting Jesus and his mission. They ask: “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus replies that they must have faith in the one sent from God. But in the third dialogue, the crowd reveals their inability to see Jesus’ true identity. They ask Jesus for a sign so that they might know that Jesus is from God. How strange this sounds since Jesus has just fed more than 5000 people. What more is expected?

But the crowd cannot see beyond the surface of the sign. They show this in their interpretation of the sign that came from Moses. In their description, they identify Jesus with Moses, as if to say, as Moses gave the people manna in the desert, give us a sign so that we will know that you are from God. They are looking

to identify a prophet without realizing that God is standing before them. Jesus corrects their misinterpretation, saying that the manna received by their ancestors came from God. As God fulfilled their ancestors’ needs in the desert, so God has provided them with food for eternal life. In the bread that they have received from Jesus, they have received physical nourishment and also spiritual nourishment. Jesus wants the crowd to see beyond the surface to the One who provides true nourishment.

The conclusion of the dialogue reveals the crowd’s blindness. They ask for what Jesus has just told them they have found: “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus answers plainly that he himself is the Bread of Life they seek. Jesus himself is the Bread of Life who will satisfy every hunger and thirst.

This is the first of several such statements found in John’s Gospel. We understand these better when we remember that God revealed his name to the people of Israel as “I am,” as Yahweh. Jesus is now claiming this name for himself. In the weeks ahead, we will see the offense that this gives to the people.

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