

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Scripture Readings**

#### **First 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."

#### **Second Reading: Ephesians 4:17, 20-24**

Brothers and sisters: 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.

#### **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 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."

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### **Psalm 78**

**The Lord gave them bread from heaven.**

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 his holy land, to the mountains his right hand had won.

**The Lord gave them bread from heaven.**

**Draw near to your servants, O Lord, and answer their prayers with unceasing kindness, that, for those who glory in you as their Creator and guide, you may restore what you have created and keep safe what you have restored.**

**Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Breaking Open the Word**

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

**What is Jesus saying to me personally, that will give hope and encouragement to me now?**

**Am I aware of Jesus' living words in the people and world around me?**

**How will I respond to Jesus' message in my life?**

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **What Does It All Mean?**

#### **First Reading: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15**

Every spring, insects feed themselves on tamarisk trees in the Sinai. Their secretions resemble honey. The resulting crusty substance is known as manna, as it has been known since time immemorial. As Moses leads Israel toward the promised land, the people are hungry, and they know nothing of manna. They complain because they can remember a time in their not very distant past when they were able to eat all they wanted by the stoves in their homes in Egypt. Although they grumble to Moses, really they are complaining to God. But God assures Moses that the people will eat meat in the twilight, and bread in the morning. The seasonal migration of quail arrives from Europe that evening, and the tamarisk drops its manna at dawn. This is the bread that will fill them so that the people may know that the Lord is their God. However else we might be able to explain it, this manna is a heavenly meal. It is also connected inseparably to a community enacting God's word. It is a miracle for a hungry people, slaves who have escaped their bondage in response to God's call. It is also a test for this people, who will not eat if they fail to follow instructions. In different words, the manna story displays the fundamentals of what we would later call "sacrament." It describes a community struggling to live faithfully—which can be understood in more than one way—and God's presence is revealed.

#### **Second Reading: Ephesians 4:17, 20-24**

Continuing to teach the church at Ephesus, site of an important temple to Artemis, the author declares that the Christians there cannot live like pagans any longer. These verses set a "fresh, spiritual way of thinking" in opposition to the "empty minds" that characterize pagan life. Verses 18 and 19 omitted from this text, describe the consequences of pagan ignorance. Christians should have learned to set aside the old self of illusion and desire: This is the real work of converting to the Christian way, and immersion in Christ's death and resurrection. The final verse describes what truth accomplishes when it is embodied in the lives of Christians: justice and holiness. This couplet echoes the best of Hebrew prophecy. The challenge to an ancient Asia Minor church is our challenge as well. There remains much that we must abandon, while we allow Christ to clothe us in new selves. We must think and act in God's image, expressing justice and holiness born of truth.

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

John portrays these scenes: Jesus feeds a crowd of five thousand families; he sails away to escape the press of the crowd; the crowd chases after him in boats; after what is sure to have been a lengthy search they find him on the other side of the lake. They ask him three questions, and he answers only indirectly. To the first, "When did you get here?" he

tells them that they must work for imperishable food. To the second question, "What must we do to perform God's works?" he replies, "Have faith in the One he sent." And to their third question, "What sign, like manna, will you give us?" Jesus teaches that his Father gives bread from heaven that gives life to the world. To their request for this bread of life, he teaches that he is that bread. Whoever comes to him shall never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will not thirst.

### **Upgrade**

"You've changed" is a tricky phrase. What should sound like a compliment is most often used, instead, as an insult. It is a phrase often used negatively toward people who have grown in their faith and turn away from sinful habits and inclinations. In this case, "you've changed" could not be a higher affirmation of a soul responding to the light of Christ before them. This is the mindset of St. Paul toward the Ephesians in this week's second reading. He encourages them to "...put away the old self..." and "...be renewed in the spirit..." God is calling us forward, not backward. The desire to "go back" is common as we experience the growing pains of faith, and we see the Israelites learn this the hard way in the first reading. God leads them to the Promised Land out of the slavery of Egypt, but that didn't mean it was going to be a ride on easy street to get there. The path to freedom led them through a desert which required them to be dependent. God had taken the Israelites out of Egypt, but now he had to, "take Egypt out of the Israelites." His great nation had forgotten him; many had instead worshipped the Egyptians' false gods. Thus, through their time in the desert, the Lord (in his mercy) was trying to both provide for them and teach them the importance of dependence on him—and him alone. Jesus refers to this Old Testament scene in the Gospel. During this Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus directs the people to look beyond the physical food they hungered for, and to instead see the eternal life for which they should have been yearning. He calls them to change their lives and perspectives, focusing less on the bread in front of them (multiplication of loaves) and more on the Bread that had come down to them (Jesus).