

August 5, 2018 18th Sunday in Ordinary time

In the first reading, the Israelites are in the desert escaping from Egypt. And of course, we know in the desert that not a lot of food grows and not a lot of food is available. It's interesting, that in Australia when the Europeans first to Australia they found aborigines that were well fed. Australia is the worst continent to be able to grow food or obtain food, and they were well fed. When the Europeans tried to survive there, they starve to death. So there is food in the desert but you have to know what to do with it. These were people who were raised in the city, going out into the country. They had to have food so they complained. If you read the Old Testament the Israelites are nothing but a bunch of whiners and complainers. That's all they do is whine and complain and I get so sick of reading that stuff. It's like, "Geese man." You would think they would write something else besides what whiners complainers they are but they don't, they write that. In our first reading Moses has to go to God and say, "Hey, they've got a valid point this time, give us some food." The people are complaining saying, "We had all this produce the river Nile provided. We had flesh pots to eat from." Flesh pot. Do we use that word in everyday language? "Oh look, there's a beautiful person there must be a flesh pot." "Oh, I'm going to go down to the local flesh pot and have a hamburger. No, it just meant that they had a lot of meat to eat because the Egyptians were able to raise cattle and other animals for food. They were saying, "We were well fed, we had our fill of bread, we were well fed. Now we are not well fed." So Moses has to go to God and God gives them quail. For 40 years the menu was quail. For 40 years the menu was this stuff that came down out of the sky and dried on the ground and they didn't know what it was so you know what they called it? Manna. Do you know what manna means? In Hebrew it means, "what is this?" Because we don't know the language we are being ripped off of all kinds of good jokes in these readings. So it's, "What are we having for dinner tonight?" "What is this." That's what they considered bread, so it means God provided for them. Now this is all in the earthly setting. Let's talk about bread for a minute. At the time of Jesus and before in the European nations in the Middle Ages, bread was different than what you and I eat. Bread was a totally different creature, totally different animal. What we consider bread today is nothing. Those of us that are old enough to remember Wonder Bread, the white stuff, it was just another way of processing cardboard that tasted really really good. It's interesting, in 21 years of going out with people to lunch, breakfast, and dinner, no one's ever ordered white bread or toast until last week. Two people ordered white bread or white toast. It's like, "Woo, they still make that?" But bread in that time and coming forward was totally different. The stuff we have has only been readily available for 40 or 50 years, maybe 60. My dad used to have this saying. "Wow, that's amazing, it's like sliced bread!" He remembers when bread wasn't sliced, you had to slice it yourself. I don't want to give scandal to children today. But the bread will eat is not nutritious. People say, "Oh, well it's whole-wheat." No it's not. Do you feel any grinding of wheat in there? They ground it up already, it's not whole-wheat. They lie to us, this is not bread this is not life sustaining. The bread that we're talking about in the Scriptures, in history, was this huge heavy loaf. If you took this loaf of bread and dropped it on the table, thump! It would do that. It had raisins and it had seeds and it had all healthy stuff in there and so it kept people alive, it was life-giving. Breakfast in the middle ages was beer and bread. The water was so bad, they made beer. Benjamin Franklin said, "Beer is the sign that God loves us." I'm not so sure because I don't like beer, but anyway. In Jesus's time the meal of choice was wine and bread. You got meat maybe once or twice a year if you were lucky. So bread was life sustaining. When we read in the Bible about bread, it takes on this super meaning of life-giving, life-sustaining. We would never think that whole-wheat bread would be life-sustaining, life-giving, and that's all we could eat and we'd be fine. We know that we would be missing other things. But for the people in this time and era, bread was

everything. It was more like for us, to equate it to what we have, it would be like a heavy fruitcake that you get sometimes and some of you eat it and some of you pass it on. But it's a heavy heavy cake. So they're eating this, this is what gives them life. When the Israelites are talking about bread in the first reading, that's what they're talking about. It takes on this whole meaning because when you say, "I give you bread," it means I'm giving you life, I'm giving you everything.

We see in the gospel today a continuation of the sixth chapter of John. The bread of life chapter. The bread of life discourse. In this gospel Jesus is trying to introduce and educate the people on a different meaning of bread. Jesus feeds them last week, fed the 5000 plus the 15,000, He feeds them bread. He gives them free food in an age where when you had to work like a dog to get fed, this is an amazing thing. So when Jesus and his disciples disappear to go rest, and people say, "Where is he?" Most of them are following him because they want more free food. Jesus says, "Do not work for food that perishes." Bread perishes when we eat it, it's no longer bread and it disappears. Unless we eat too much of it and it puts it on her hips, bread disappears. But Jesus is saying now, "Look, listen to me." He says, "Let's go from this earthly substance, let's move up to a supernatural substance. A supernatural reality and understanding." In this world today we have a different understanding of supernatural. When you say supernatural everyone thinks; witches, ghosts, goblins, zombies, vampires, all that garbage. But that's not as a Christian, what we believe supernatural is. Supernatural is beyond our senses beyond our existence. So if supernatural is beyond our senses and we can see a vampire, he's not supernatural. They have corrupted the word. Jesus wants us to think on his level. And for us in the world today, we don't think enough of heaven, we don't think enough of hell. Because our view of supernatural has gotten away from that. Not only that, but we are surrounded by something that has taken the place of supernatural. Technology. Where is the Internet? It's out there. Yes, my computer comes on and I use it, but it's out there. Is the Internet in my house? We say it is but is it really? Can you go to a certain place and point, there is the internet. When I was at a drugstore one time getting a prescription filled, the pharmacist came out and sat down and I'm thinking, "Oh this is not good news." He says, "Father, I can't find your prescription, it's out there somewhere." There's where the Internet is. It's kind of like this supernatural thing; we can't see it, we can't taste it, we can't smell it, it's out there. Other technologies; we get in these cars and trucks and we just turn on the ignition, we don't have any idea how all that other stuff works, it just does. Now we're getting into driverless cars and in Europe they have driverless semi's all over the roads. America's cringing because, a driverless semi? And then they have flying cars. We're surrounded by pseudo-supernatural. We don't understand it and so it gets pushed over into supernatural and because of that, we don't spend our time thinking about heaven, we don't think about hell, we don't think about angels, we don't think about Jesus and what He's talking about. But Jesus is trying to get the people to go into a supernatural level and so He talks about food that doesn't perish. When you're talking to people who have to work like slaves and dogs to get their daily bread and you say food that does not perish, this is like wow! Let me have it. It's like taking a pill and never having to eat again. And Jesus is, "No, no you don't understand." He said, "You have to work not for food that perishes but for food that doesn't perish. They ask what can we do to accomplish the works of God. And Jesus tells them, "Believe in the one who sent Me." This is saying, listen to another type of bread and what is that type of bread? The Word. The Word of God. This word of God gets into us. It doesn't just get into our physical being, it gets into our soul. So now bread is taken on a spiritual meaning, it's a holistic thing, stomach-body-soul, everything. The bread that we talk about in the Gospels, the bread that we talk about receiving up here in the Eucharist, it's a holistic thing is for the entire being. It's not just to sustain life on this earth, it's to sustain life in the next life, eternal life. So Jesus is trying, (we have

two more weeks of chapter 6, it's a long one) He is trying to get them to understand. Move beyond your stomach, move up here, think about God. Let the Bread of Life, the Word of God, both in the Eucharist, and in sacraments, but also in the word that we read in the gospels, the word we preach and proclaim. Let that word come into us, fill us, change us, transform us, and be the reason that people look at us and say, "What is different about you?" And you can say, "I've been fed on a really wonderful kind of bread." And they'll look at you and say, "I want that too." Then you'll be able to open yourselves to being agents of Jesus and getting them to follow as well. It's only as Christians that we pull away from the gentile way of thinking, which is the secular way of thinking as St. Paul says in our second reading. He says, "you must no longer live as the Gentiles do." The Gentiles in St. Paul's time were pagans. Pagans don't think of supernatural; eat, drink, and be merry and then we die. In the 60s, it changed to sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. Nothing about spiritual life, nothing about the next life. Everything was focused on this one. St. Paul says, "We cannot think like them, we have to think about heaven, we have to think about hell, we have to think about Jesus and how we can change the world by bringing the in supernatural bread that is Him." St. Paul says, "Put away your old self, put away the self that is enjoying this pagan lifestyle, start becoming Christian, start renewing because of the spirit of God that comes to us through the Word in the Bread of Life. So today bread takes on a new meaning. And because of Jesus, it doesn't mean it's something that we put peanut butter and jelly on. It means something that can get us to heaven ultimately and can help us transform our communities and our families.

God bless you.