

We continue today with another reading from the sixth chapter of John. It began last week with the multiplication of loaves and fish with all its Eucharistic implications. Today's Gospel takes place the next day as the people came looking for Jesus. Jesus and his disciples were on the other side of the lake. The disciples crossed over by themselves, but Jesus met up with them walking on the water. That's why the Gospel for this Sunday begins with the crowds saying, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus responds that they are only looking for him because they ate of the bread and fish the day before and wanted more today. They were not concerned with the sign that He performed. They were just concerned with free food and it seemed that they wanted it every time they were with Jesus.

It seems like they still had the mindset of their ancestors, still wanting, still thinking that they deserved this bread from heaven, without having to ask for it.

But they forgot what God told their ancestors that each day the people are to go out and only gather their daily portion; to test them, to see whether they follow his instructions or not.

Jesus gave us those same instructions when he taught his disciples and us to pray. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask for our "daily bread." We don't ask for a week's worth of bread, or enough bread for the whole family, or even bread for next week Sunday. We just petition for "daily bread." That means there's an expectation that the prayer gets used EVERY day! How many of us truly ask God daily for his care, for our daily bread?

My wife Joan and I were talking about the Gospel reading for this week when she reminded me of something I had forgotten about. Though this may date me and there are many here today who may not be able to relate to what she said. She reminded me of a time when before receiving communion one would have to abstain from eating or drinking anything after midnight. Joan said "Remember how hungry you felt before communion and then after receiving that small host your hunger went away."

Now we only have to wait one hour, which means you could probably eat on your way to church and still be within that hour. You just don't get the same effect or appreciation of that feeling of hunger and of being filled.

The people who were following Jesus started to understand a little when they ask Jesus “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.”

For us it starts with the two words that we proclaim at Mass, these two words define precisely who we are, and what we hold to be true: The two words: “We believe.”

The creed is our mission statement. It is the basis for all that we do in the Mass, and for all that forms our lives as Christians. From that comes forth every urge, every choice, every gesture, and every act. From that, comes Christianity itself.

Ultimately, if we believe “in the one God sent,” we cannot help but live differently. We cannot help but match our lives to God’s will, and strive even more earnestly to follow in the footsteps of his Son. We cannot help but make choices that reflect belief and faith. It’s a belief in, and faith in, the risen Christ.

That is what Paul is getting at when he writes in his Letter to the Ephesians:

“You should put away the old self of your former way of life and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

Twice this Sunday, the Scriptures remind us that belief is a kind of nourishment and that it feeds us like bread.

The Israelites get a taste of that literally, when God gives them manna in the desert. “This,” Moses explains, “is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.” That serves as a sign, and an encouragement: God will sustain them. They will not go hungry.

And in the Gospel, reminding his followers of that Exodus moment and foreshadowing his own last supper, Jesus reveals that he is the bread the Lord has given them to eat. God will continue to sustain them, but in ways they never imagined or expected.

Twenty centuries later, his followers are still being fed from that bread. It is feeding the hungry on every continent, at every kind of table that you can imagine. It is nourishing those of every language, and every culture.

It is satisfying the cravings of those who long for hope. It is satisfying the emptiness of those who yearn for love. It is fortifying those who feel ignored, weak, rejected or cast out. It is bread, whose bounty knows no limits.

You can't buy it. You can't bake it. You can't have it delivered. There is only one thing you need to have access to it. You have to believe.