

**12 Pentecost
August 12, 2018**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus taught us
the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

For no fewer than five Sundays, of which this is the third, the Gospel readings are from this same chapter of John's Gospel, which has many references to the image of Bread. They explore the theme of our Lord as Bread for our very Souls./// In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say, "I am the Bread of Life". Those who heard him say it - did not understand and the author probably knew that people of all time would have a problem understanding it. But there is so much about this in this Gospel, that we know there must be something pretty important about it. Certainly it is pretty important for US, considering that we worship together with the Eucharist as our central act of worship. We hear "The Body of Christ/The Bread of Heaven" at nearly every Eucharist as we receive Communion. ///// The message of Today's Gospel is clearly that our Lord is trying to bring the disciples toward a deeper reality of what his teachings mean. We can probably find ourselves among those disciples.

We can probably also find ourselves to some degree being like some of the other persons in this Gospel. Think about the mumblers, the grumblers. Even though God constantly fed them, they would rather doubt and mutter than draw closer and try to learn about their God. They would rather challenge Jesus, saying: "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you do? Our fathers ate the manna provided to them in the wilderness." Well, one thing we all know well, is that food is only nourishing to those who eat it. Jesus can only be our Life Source, our Living Bread if we will come to know him...if we will let him in our lives. If we are always having some reservation, always intellectualizing, always holding back from being truly Present to the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in our sharing of Holy Communion...that is Never to know the GIFT of LIFE offered to us.

I think of it as being given a lovely gift, tied up with a beautiful blue ribbon, that we put on a shelf and never open. The gift only has meaning for us if we take it off the shelf, untie the blue ribbon, open it up and truly receive it. This is a gift our Lord is offering to us. Let us truly receive this gift. Let us open it and imagine Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives. Imagine him in our relationships, our conversations, our use of time and our use of money. Jesus says, "Take, eat, THIS is my body which is given for you!" He knows well what we need. We need Communion with him.

People are always looking for what sustains them, what is satisfying. The imagery of Bread is perfect. All over the world, Bread was, and is, the universal staple of existence. We also know that all over the world many people go hungry. And also, all over the world people go wanting and unsatisfied because they do not accept the gift of Life Jesus offers. Think how he taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." He wasn't referring only to the bread on the table. He was referring to the heavenly nourishment he knows we need always...every day. And it is that which he offers us! // May our response be much like that of the disciples, "Lord, Give us THIS Bread always."

We have a Prayer in our Book of Common Prayer which speaks of Holy Scripture and prays...that we may read, mark, learn and INWARDLY DIGEST. Now, this prayer is referring to Scripture, but, in the same way, when we feed on, and inwardly digest the Spirit of the Living God, when we allow Jesus to be our Bread of Life, what he is... becomes a part of us! /// When we take into our being... the love, purpose, compassion, justice, forgiveness, mercy and grace of Jesus... THAT becomes a part of us...THAT gives Life to us. It is far more than a symbolic idea.

Just because our Lord's expression of a truth is difficult for us to truly comprehend, does not negate its truth. Rather, when we do trust him And partake of this Holy Food, we increasingly find that we are indeed nourished

and we grow spiritually. Mystically yes, but, we find that we are somehow stronger, better able to fight the good fight, no matter what form that may take for each of us. The Real Presence of Christ is communicated to us in the Bread and Wine of the Sacred Offering of Holy Communion. It is able to satisfy so many levels of hunger: hunger for meaning, hunger for faith, for hope, for peace, hunger for the capacity to be more loving and forgiving, hunger to know we ARE forgiven.

As we experience Holy Communion this morning, as we receive the sacred bread and wine, may we experience in a deeper way, the mystical communion with Christ, His Real Presence, and God's Love for us. As you receive the Sacramental Bread, allow who Jesus is... to truly become a part of you...so that more and more, as St. Paul wrote, we will become "imitators of Christ." //// Untie that blue ribbon and experience the most wonderful gift from God in Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Unfortunately, many people look everywhere but the right place to find the "soul food" we all need. By "soul food" we mean the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, which brings guidance and hope and a meaningful life. When Jesus said he was the bread of life, he meant that to internalize Christ is to find the strength and peace in our soul that each of us needs. ///// Of course this is mysterious. However, we do know that those who decide to make Jesus the Lord of their lives ARE somehow, mysteriously, raised up. Many Christians will vouch for the fact that choosing Jesus as the Lord of their lives raised their whole understanding of life, their vision of life's meaning, their sense of joy about being alive.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the ordinary presence of bread to share the extraordinary presence of himself. He takes something quite familiar and ordinary to share something extraordinary. And from then on, all of God's children, then and now, are challenged to know, through ordinary pieces of bread at the Eucharist, the extraordinary presence of the risen Lord. And beyond that, since we have been fed at God's Holy Table, we are encouraged to see the extraordinary presence of God in the ordinary presence of each other. It's pretty high minded; actually, it's pretty mind boggling!

Surely we realize that obviously, Jesus was not referring to actual bread; clearly he meant something far more profound. Jesus wants to address the hunger within every human being. This is the hunger that God only, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is able to fill; this is what he is talking about.

Sunday after Sunday we proclaim, "The Body of Christ...the bread of Heaven." These words are chosen very deliberately because they express what the church truly believes...Our Lord Jesus Christ IS our bread...our true sustenance. When WE are really present, we will experience the Real Presence of our Lord for ourselves. We will know. ///// Sadly, some take that all too lightly, or indeed disregard its potential for power and peace in our lives. /////

You know...some people think they know better than God's word. /////It reminds me of the story of a ship's captain. A story I may have shared before, but it is SO relevant. It's about a ship's captain, who thought he was smarter than anybody. It seems the ship's captain, the captain of a huge ship, peered into the dark night, a starless night, and saw a faint light in the distance. He ordered his signalman to transmit a message: "Alter your course ten degrees south."

From the light in the distance came this prompt reply. "Alter YOUR course ten degrees north."

Now angry, the captain sent a second message: "Alter your course ten degrees south...I am the captain." An immediate response signaled, "Alter YOUR course ten degrees north...I am seaman third class Jones."

The captain was furious ... "Alter your course ten degrees south... I am a battleship." To which the now - not very distant light, replied, "Alter your course ten degrees north...I am the lighthouse!/////

All the captain's ordering and pride could not change the truth of where he was headed. He was headed for the rocks. ///// Many of us will hear God's word today and yet be just like that captain. God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, has told us the way it is. He has shown us the way. He has told us how to steer our ship. But, are we like the captain? Unwilling to change our course, our way, because we refuse to relinquish control of our life to the true giver and sustainer of ALL of our life? /// Jesus has told us...we hear it every Sunday...He is the Bread of Life...focusing on Him is THE way to steer our ships, to run our lives.

This essential bread Jesus identified with himself with God's love made visible in the flesh, reaching out to satisfy the deepest hungers we may have. To give a sense of wholeness and well-being, a lasting purpose and meaning to daily life, a way by which we can be drawn out of self centered preoccupation, a way by which a person may be freed from loneliness and darkness, freed INTO caring about others more than self. In the bread and wine of the Eucharist, Jesus gives himself to us with the words "This is my Body...This is my blood." In other words, "As you eat and drink, I give myself to you." Like a magnet, his loving presence draws us AWAY from ourselves into a focus upon our Lord and his promises...into a certainty where life's deepest hungers and thirsts are satisfied and where we are assured of an eternal relationship with him.

Let US not be like the ship's captain and think we know better than THE authority for our lives. God, in His love, offers bread by which we will never hunger. And THAT bread is the very gift of our Lord Jesus Christ and our faith in him, through the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit.

May it be so, more and more, day by day, for each one of us.

AMEN