

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 4, 2024

“Do not work for food that perishes . . .”

So says Jesus to the crowds of people who continued to follow him everywhere. Jesus had been getting the attention of people for a while now. But this time his actions took it to another level. As we heard last week, Jesus had just done the seemingly unthinkable, the “impossible”.

With just a couple of fish and five loaves he had somehow fed thousands, somehow satisfied an enormous crowd of people who were hungry and who weren't sure where they would find their next meal. For those present that day who were aware of what had happened, this must have been seen as a true miracle, an action that could only be attributed to the hand of God. And they wanted more, more signs, more healings, more inspired words from the mouth of Jesus, more “miracles”. Who wouldn't want all those things?

Life for most people in the time of Jesus was precarious, to say the least. Most people didn't even know from day-

to-day whether or not they would be able to provide for themselves or for their families, they didn't know if they would even survive another day, another week, another month let alone another year. Securing enough food, shelter, and clothing was not a sure thing. And remaining safe through all of it was not a sure thing either. Life was short. Life was brutal. Life was dangerous. Life was unpredictable. And so for Jesus to demonstrate his power to them in this way would have been a complete game-changer. Here was a guy who could somehow feed thousands. What else might he be able to do? And so they followed.

“Do not work for food that perishes . . .”

I wonder what they thought when Jesus said those words to them. For many (if not all) of them, working for their own continued existence and that of their families was probably ALL they worked for. It was the only way to survive - toiling from sunrise to sunset six days a week and resting for one, because that's what they believed God had commanded them to do. Do not work for food that perishes? What could Jesus mean?

And then he told them,

“ . . . my Father gives you true bread from heaven . . . ”

And then the words that must have shocked them,

**“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me
will never hunger,
and whoever believes in me
will never thirst.”**

If you asked people in the time of Jesus to name those things they could not live without, there's a good chance that nearly everyone would say “water and bread”.

Without those things, they simply couldn't survive. They were critical, essential and indispensable.

And yet, Jesus was telling them that there was something that was even more important to their well-being, to their survival, something that could satisfy their hunger and thirst in ways that bread and water couldn't. Of course, that “something” wasn't a “thing” at all.

It was Jesus himself.

“Do not work for food that perishes . . . ”

It's hard not to work for "food that perishes". And of course, that phrase is meant to include all of our earthly needs (and by extension, all of our wants too). There are many things that we need in this life: food, water, shelter, security, money, medical care, etc . . . Is God really saying that we shouldn't work toward these things?

I don't think so. It seems that Jesus is trying to make sure we have the proper relationship between God and these other things, that we don't relentlessly pursue the things of this world at the expense of our relationship with God. In other words, the *WAY* we pursue these other needs, the choices we make and the attitudes we possess while doing so, matter. It's a kind of spiritual trap to try to use any means possible, and go to any length, to try to meet our earthly needs. When we do that, we are essentially saying (to God and the world) that our hope ultimately lies with the fruits of our own efforts. And yet God knows that these things simply don't last. They are not eternal. We, however, somehow seem to forget that. And the hungers persist.

My dear friends what are the things in your life that have all your attention and motivation and focus? What are the "perishable foods" you are pursuing, worldly things that

ultimately cannot satisfy? Where are the areas of your life in which God seems to be almost irrelevant? In other words, what (or whom) can you not live without?

My dear friends, our God wants to be real food for us. He wants to feed us with every good thing, satisfy us in ways that only he can.

So what are we filling ourselves up with instead?