August 22-23, 2015 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time All Saints Parish

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Jesus: The Bread of Life

Today’s Gospel is a continuation of the ‘Bread of Life’ passage in the Gospel of John. What was the “hard saying” that many could not accept? Previously, Jesus had said, “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” Many could not accept this saying and walked away from Jesus. The Apostles remained and Peter spoke for them when he said, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

The community gathers every week to hear Jesus’ Words of eternal life. Sacred Scripture tells us that eternal life begins now and leads into the future. Jesus’ words help us to follow that path. How can we, like Peter, trust this? We trust it because of the effect these words have on us. We share the same Bread, and so we open ourselves to others. We realize our bond with those who share the same table. Eating together always forms a bond. If we eat with someone often enough, we can only become friends. The formation of community is at the heart of the Eucharistic meal.

As members of the Eucharistic community we open ourselves to the needs of our world, or at least the part of the world that we connect with. We become concerned with the needs of others and, according to our gifts, minister to them in ways that we used to speak of as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. We serve both bodily and spiritual needs of others. We concern ourselves with the homeless, the imprisoned, those who need education, the hungry, those who need a caring work to nourish their spirits. We realize that in serving others, Jesus is present. When speaking about the presence of Jesus in the service we offer others, I always remember theologian Dorothee Solle’s reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. She reflects that no place in the parable is God mentioned; yet none of us would deny that God’s presence permeates the parable.

As Solle reflects, God is present when we serve others. We do this all the time. Parents serve one another and they serve their children. Teachers serve their students by making learning attractive to them and rejoicing with them when they succeed and encouraging them when they have difficulties. Perhaps, amidst the busyness of serving, we might find a moment or two to experience God present among us in that service.

As members of the Eucharistic Community, we know the Bread of Life refers to more than the Eucharistic Presence. The Bread of Life also refers to the Revelation that helps us live life to the fullest. Bread is often referred to as the ‘Staff of Life.’ It is a basic food. And the Eucharist is the basic nourishment of the community. Most every culture has a basic bread that people eat regularly. The Bread of Revelation is eaten regularly, also, by the community, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly. The basic revelation is that Jesus is the revelation of what God desires of us all. Jesus is present to the marginalized; we are called to represent Jesus among the marginalized, those whom our society or culture deem as less. Jesus is present to the stranger, the foreigner. We are called to be present stranger, the foreigner. We are asked to open ourselves to understand what is foreign or strange to us – different world religions, various local religions, those religions confined to a particular locality, different customs or priorities than our own.

Jesus is present to the vulnerable – children, the poor, the elderly – anyone who depends on others for the necessities of life. We are called to be present to the vulnerable, to do what we can to ensure the dignity of those who are vulnerable to the scheming of the unscrupulous.

Jesus is present among us in the ordinary life exchanges of those who are lucky enough to be free and interdependent, knowing that our growth is relative to our concern for those among whom we live. Jesus is present to those who do not know him, luring them by his love to be concerned for others. They may not know him, but they experience him in their concern.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is present to us in the Eucharist, but the Eucharist strengthens us to reach out to others, just as Jesus reaches out to us.

Amen!