



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

August 2, 2015

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel reading John 6:24-35 [To be read aloud]

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal."

So they said to him, "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." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:

He gave them bread from heaven to eat." So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Brief commentary:

The theme of God's providence in the Bible is often depicted as God providing the most essential sustenance that gives life, food and water. Just like parents concern themselves for the life and wellbeing of their children by providing nourishment, so the imagery of nourishment in biblical stories conveys God's personal care for the humanity. The Sunday readings throughout this month will emphasize that the ultimate way in which God provides for the deepest needs of humanity is by providing the divine food that gives the fullness of life and allows the human person to thrive. This heavenly food is not *something*, but rather *Someone* who would offer himself totally as the gift of life-giving divine grace, Jesus Christ. By describing himself as 'the bread of life come down from heaven, sent by God', not only does Jesus affirm the continuity between the providence of God in the lives of the Hebrews throughout their arduous desert journey from slavery toward the Promised Land and throughout Israel's history, but asserts that God is now doing something radically new through him. Rather than providing material sustenance, now 'the One sent from God' is himself the way in which God is giving new life to the world. The gospel tells us that many sought him looking for material sustenance, but Jesus told them not to "work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." Jesus' message was that God was doing something far more radical than providing the material conditions for temporary benefits, but rather something more profound, more enduring, more far-reaching. Rather than blessings, God was now giving himself – the 'Gift that contains all gifts' – in the person of his Son. Bread gives itself up as gift for the life of the hungry, water gives itself up as gift for life of the thirsty: in Jesus God gives himself as total gift, as self-donation, for the fullness of life of humanity. Rather than seeking only the partial, we are now invited to seek the ultimate, the definitive, the infinite in Jesus Christ, in whom we live and thrive. This experience of new life, of divine grace, in Jesus Christ has profound implications for us: just as Jesus would live his life for us, and gave himself as food and drink for the hungry and thirsty world, so too must his followers be likewise Eucharistic. We do this by giving ourselves up as gift for the life of the world: having received the 'bread from heaven' and being quenched of our thirst, now we are strengthened to satisfy the hungers of our world: the hunger for food, for freedom and justice, for love and compassion, and quench the thirsts for meaning and purpose, for hope and salvation. "By receiving the [life-giving] Body of Christ we become the [life-giving] Body of Christ." We can do this by living in communion with Jesus Christ, forgetting ourselves so as to think of our neighbor; die to our selfishness so as to give ourselves as gift for others. Our commercial culture trains us to focus on 'the food that perishes', but the Christian is the one informed and formed by the Gospel and by the love of God to 'work what endures for eternal life'. Today Jesus Christ calls us to be free from the world's way of thinking and valuing, from its perspective and attitudes and ways of being, and instead trust him so much so as to make a radical change of thinking, valuing and living. Only then can we make a real difference in a world starving and parched for the 'true living bread come down from heaven'.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- This month our readings call us to consider how God provides for the deepest hungers and thirsts of humanity in the life-giving grace of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus' total self-donation is presented as bread and drink that gives itself up totally for the life of hungry and thirsty. Christians, graced by communion with Jesus' own life, can now bring his life into the world and make a real difference in the lives of people.
- Christians must not become dulled, complacent and satisfied by the material commercial perspectives and values, but must allow their thinking, perspectives, values, attitudes, and lifestyle to be radically transformed by the Gospel and by God's grace. Attention to the Gospel rather than life *as if* God did not exist or of little consequence is vital to Christian life.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- How has God satisfied the hungers of my heart and the thirsts of my life?
- How can I 'deny myself' so as to more lovingly serve my neighbor?
- How has my thinking, valuing and living been shaped by material commercial culture? How can I allow the Gospel and God's grace in Christ Jesus to more thoroughly transform me?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 1322-81