

Proper 13

Sunday between 31 July and 6 August inclusive ·
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Principal Service readings

Exodus 16.2–4,9–15	Manna, bread from the Lord
Psalms 78.23–29	‘mortals ate the bread of angels’
Ephesians 4.1–16	There is one body and one Spirit
John 6.24–35	Jesus, the bread of life

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus, the bread of life

²⁴When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were at the place where Jesus had given the bread, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ ²⁶Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.’ ²⁸Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ ²⁹Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ ³⁰So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?’ ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” ³²Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ³⁴They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

³⁵Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

John 6.24–35 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

At the beginning of the chapter we hear that, 'the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand' (6.4). This is the setting for what follows, the miracle of the loaves and fish (6.5-15), and the discourse on the bread from heaven (6.25-59). The Passover is the first of several feasts, and is followed by: Tabernacles (7.1–10.21); Dedication (10.22-42).

Jesus' response to the crowd, that they are looking for him 'because you ate your fill of the loaves', refers to the feeding of the five thousand (6.5-15). In that incident, they are seeking a miracle, eat the miraculously made bread, and then seek to make Jesus king (6.15). Now, they have even lost a sense of the miraculous and merely want to fill their bellies. Jesus advises them to seek 'the food that endures for eternal life' (6.27).

They then demand a sign to stimulate their belief (6.30), and refer to the example of Moses who provided miraculous bread in the desert (6.32) – see Exodus 16.15.² The 'bread from heaven' was identified by Jewish wisdom and midrashic³ traditions with the gift of the law (cf. Exodus 16.4; Psalms 78.24; 105.40; Nehemiah 9.15; Wisdom 16.20.) Jesus corrects the crowd to say that it wasn't Moses who provided the bread but God himself (6.32).

The people are trying to force Jesus into a Mosaic model, but Jesus affirms that the bread comes down from heaven, and that this refers to himself, as he says, 'I am the bread of life' (6.35), one of the seven 'I am' statements in John's gospel.⁴

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² St Paul mentions this as a figure of the Eucharist, 1 Corinthians 10.3-4.

³ The midrash is a tradition of exegetical textual interpretation of scripture.

⁴ The seven are: the bread of life (John 6); the light of the world (John 8); the good shepherd (John 10); the resurrection and the life (John 11); the way, the truth. And the life (John 14); the true vine (John 15).

Quotations

1

God comes near to us unendingly in the bread of life, the food of resurrection. Everything has to be built up round this seed of fire.

The roots of Christian mysticism: text and commentary / Olivier Clément. 1995. p.125

2

Farmers everywhere provide bread for all humanity, but it is Christ alone who is the bread of life...Even if all the physical hunger of the world were satisfied, even if everyone who is hungry were fed by his or her own labour or by the generosity of others, the deepest hunger of man would still exist...Therefore, I say, Come, all of you, to Christ. He is the bread of life. Come to Christ and you will never be hungry again.

Pope John Paul II, 1920–2005

Related topics

For further study:

Conversion; Eucharist; faith; love of God; Jesus, the bread of life; hope and trust; Jesus, the Messiah; eschatological reign of God; true discipleship; Christology

Closing Prayer

Lord, giver of lasting life,
satisfy our hunger through Christ, the Bread of Life,
and quench our thirst with your gift of belief,
that we may no longer work for food that perishes,
but believe in the One whom you have sent.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 18, Year B⁵

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⁵ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.