

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 20TH. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)
Proverbs 9: 1-6 Psalm 34 Ephesians 5: 15-20 John 6: 51-58

Dear Preachers:

Hunger is a worldwide problem. Every day about 25,000 children die from hunger and the diseases that accompany a lack of adequate diet. During these five weeks of mid-summer our gospel passages are from John 6. The series started on the 17th. Sunday with Jesus’ feeding of the large crowd (6: 1-15). The community for whom John was writing was a community marginalized from their own synagogues. In addition, they were poor themselves, as was a vast part of the population. In 1 John (3:18-18), another document addressed to the Johannine community, they are reminded to respond to a brother or sister in need. And so, it is important to notice that the “bread section” of John starts with a concern for the physical hungers of the people attracted to Jesus. But these people were not merely attracted to the material bread he could give them for they ask: “What must we do to do the works of God?” (6:28) In asking this question, they reveal a deep spiritual hunger as well. John 6 is told in ways that will remind its readers of the wanderings in the desert and God’s providing daily bread for them. It is also clear from this chapter that God is once again providing another kind of nourishment for people--- for those who are spiritually hungry. God notices hungers on every level and addresses them.

People had seen the signs Jesus was performing and so they followed him into the desert. Of course, there were those attracted to the spectacle and those who were idly curious. But no doubt, there were those who saw Jesus as One from God. Those who had been made to feel outside of proper religious (and therefore outside of God’s) special concern, experienced welcome from Jesus. He noticed them, he didn’t dismiss them when they were hungry; he didn’t test their loyalties or the quality of their faith. They were hungry and so he gave them more than enough to eat. And when they were filled they could stay around and learn more.

The food Jesus gave them was meant to be a sign for them. The abundance of bread, the 12 baskets left over, was a reminder to their Jewish sensibilities of the God who saw them through their desert journey by feeding them daily manna. But the abundance also reminded them of the God who took notice of an insignificant tribe of slaves and who had entered into lasting covenant with them. The God of their desert wanderings did more than feed their stomachs; their

hunger for God was also satisfied. Jesus, through his miracles and his word, was the sign, that God had once again come to lead them out of a new slavery.

There are deeper hungers we have that don't go away when our stomachs are full. Jesus' feeding of the crowd had stirred the people to ask if he might be "the Prophet" (6:14), a reference to the prophet-like-Moses (Dt. 18:15) they were hoping would come; one who would perform deeds of freedom for them—"signs and wonders." Thinking this was the promised Prophet, they wanted to make him king. But Jesus wanted to show them that a greater-than-Moses was in their midst and that God was offering them so much more than they could ever imagine. The great discourse we are reading is Jesus' attempt to show them that God is doing a generous thing for them (6:25-58). Our dreams may be too limited, bounded on sides with what we think is "practical" or "reasonable to expect." Maybe we underestimate what God can do for us.

The Hebrew tradition extolled the gift of wisdom. In today's first reading wisdom is personified as a woman who has built a luxurious house and spread a table for those who hunger for wisdom. The food is festive---meat and wine--- a banquet suggesting that those who participate will have reason to celebrate life. Those who eat at this banquet have found what they have wanted and needed—in wisdom, their deepest hungers are being fulfilled. The last verse of the reading suggests that any other choices we make will only lead to death. Only the foolish would choose that way. Wisdom gives us knowledge of God and how to follow God's ways in the daily choices we must make. Let those who hear these scriptures today be stirred to a hunger and yearning for wisdom. Let those who come to eat at this eucharistic table know that God has set a table of choice food for us, a food that satisfies us. Here at this table, we find what we hunger for—God and the renewed desire to do God's will. We also learn at this eucharistic celebration, that as we have been fed, so we are to feed others. First, like Jesus, we address their physical hungers; but we don't stop there. Next, we share in appropriate ways the good news of the God who elects a people and guides them through their wilderness travels.

The instruction to eat the "flesh" of the Son of Man will turn disciples away from Jesus. Taken literally---- along with "drinking my blood"—the invitation has cannibalistic overtones for his hearers. "Flesh" means the total person, remember, "the Word made flesh"? To receive the Eucharist is to take in the total person of Christ, all that he is and all that he means for us and the world. We will say,

“Amen,” as we receive the Eucharist today--- “I believe,” “So be it.” We are expressing the desire and faith that through this Eucharist we are becoming more and more the person of the Christ we are receiving. Wisdom’s banquet spread before us is the food that makes living a life faithful to God, as Jesus did, possible.

To receive Eucharist today is to do more than admire Jesus from afar, to see him as a great teacher, or to count him among the holy ones of God. To receive Eucharist today is to believe that we do not have to wait till some future date when we will be with God. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ today is to already have eternal life flowing in us, and to be assured by Jesus’ word that we will be raised on the last day. Each time we eat the flesh and drink the blood, we have wisely chosen what is “true food....true drink.” Will Jesus’ disciples want to eat of this meal, accept the commitment to him that eating the meal requires, when they see him lose everything and be executed? Their own wisdom might turn them away when they try to measure the “success” of his life. However, his wisdom will sustain them for, to the surprise of all, his death will not be a total defeat but will be the means of their entrance into life. To eat at this table then is what Proverbs would call “the way of understanding.”

QUOTABLE:

Since we are in the midst of the bread discourse from John’s Gospel and since the discourse started with Jesus’ feeding the crowds who came to him, I thought you might like some information on hunger for your preaching. The following is from the webpage of “Bread for the World” (Go to the webpage for more information since space is limited here.)

More than 800 million people in the world go hungry. In developing countries, 6 million children die each year, mostly from hunger-related causes. In the United States, 12 million children live in households where people have to skip meals or eat less to make ends meet. That means one in ten households in the U.S. are living with hunger or are at risk of hunger.

But we CAN end hunger.

We have the means. The financial costs to end hunger are relatively slight. The United Nations Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world's poorest people could be met for an additional \$13 billion a year. Animal lovers in the United States and Europe spend more than that on pet food each year. What makes the difference between millions of hungry people and

a world where all are fed?

Only a change in priorities. Only the will to end hunger.

Want to learn more? We have facts on domestic hunger, global hunger, and debt relief. We also have answers to frequently asked questions about hunger. Or you can learn about what issues we're working on right now to bring an end to hunger in the U.S. and around the world. You can also get involved or write a letter to your member of Congress.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

FrJude@JudeOP.org