



The Word...

"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God."

In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat"

(Ex 16:2-4, 12-15).

Pondering the Word ...

"What is this stuff? This doesn't look like the bread we're used to! This IS NOT what we were expecting!" Thank God Moses is there to tell them what it is. I wonder how many Israelites would have just walked away, continuing to grumble. I bet there are some looking skeptically at Moses as they go out to gather this so-called bread!

When we pray from our need or when we grumble against God for not fulfilling what we've prayed for, we may miss the nourishment we *really* need because what comes to us isn't on our terms or timeline. As is the case with much of the disappointment we experience in our lives, it is our expectations of what something *should* be or look like or, what it has looked like in the past, that can blind us to how God is answering us in ways that fill greater needs, ones we may not even realize we have.

The greater need of the Israelites was to be reminded, yet again, of God's providence. And they needed to be reminded all the time. Could it be that we need a reminder too?

Living the Word ...

Look back on the recent past. Were there disappointments? Arguments? Things that left you simmering below the surface? Perhaps there is nothing major you are praying about but take a close look at times you've been disappointed in how things turned out. See if you can identify the expectations behind that disappointment.

I am not saying expectations are bad. We have expectations for our kids and their behavior (note: their behavior, not necessarily their accomplishments); for how people in civil society are supposed to act (although we forget what is "normal" for us may not be normal for those who come from different backgrounds or cultures.) Expectations are, in fact, the basis for how we negotiate our daily lives. I'm speaking here about how often we impose our definitions, our opinions on situations or on others, only to be disappointed when things don't turn out the way we think they should.

Now, look back on your life. Are there things you prayed for that didn't turn out the way you wanted? Did you walk away, or do you still look skeptically at God? (Which, BTW, is understandable. Continue grumbling at God to keep the conversation going!) If you are unable to see God in your situation, think about asking a trusted guide to journey with you. They may be able to help you see and understand what God has provided.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Aug 5: *"The prophets who were before you and me prophesied war, woe, and pestilence. But the prophet who prophesies peace is recognized as truly sent by the LORD only when his prophetic prediction is fulfilled"* (Jer 28:1-17). Hananiah tells the people what they want to hear. Moreover, he puts a timeframe on God. He doesn't speak of trusting in God's mercy or call for change. His prophesying is fortune telling. True prophets don't predict specifics about the future. They look at the present, they learn from the past, and they call for the hard work of change. And they don't put limits on God. **Provision: What prophets do you listen to?** The portrayal of human nature in the Book of Jeremiah is striking and eerily pertinent to us today; we would all do well to heed its message. Pay close attention and be discerning about the prophets to whom you choose to listen.

Tue, Aug 6: *Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus* (Mk 9:2-10). I could be accused of taking the practice of Ignatian contemplation a step too far here, but I like to imagine what Jesus, Elijah, and Moses talk about. Like my buddy, Peter, I usually interrupt the conversation when I would be better off listening in! **Provision: What do you imagine about this conversation?** I hope Elijah and Moses are supportive of Jesus, reassuring him and telling him to hang in there! Or perhaps they just muse about human nature. See if you can put yourself in this scene. Don't be terrified. You are surrounded by Divine love. Listen in. Listen to Jesus. What do you hear?

Wed, Aug 7: *A Canaanite woman called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." ... His disciples asked him, "Send her away." ... He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Mt 15:21-28). Later in this passage, Jesus refers to this woman as a "dog." That is upsetting to a lot of people. There's a context we can go into, but there's something else I notice. Jesus, seeking to get away from the crowds, could have easily had his disciples run her off. But he doesn't. He engages her—a Gentile woman—seeking to explain his thinking. By doing so, he allows her to engage him, to call him out, to get him to look more broadly at the mission to which God has called him. **Provision: Listen to other voices who call out.** Wow, I could go into a diatribe about how this applies to the leaders of organized religion, but I'll leave it at that. Instead, I need to examine the "Canaanites" I dismiss, the people God has sent to call me out of my limited view of God's reach. Whose voices do you ignore or dismiss?

Thu, Aug 8: *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.... you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church," ... "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do"* (Mt 16:13-23). This reading is on my "Top Ten List of Favorite Scriptures." This also hearkens back to Sunday's reflection about expectations. Peter gets a major ego stroke and is feeling very pleased with himself and his insight. So, of course, he uses that same insight to tell Jesus that he is wrong about what is going to happen to him. Jesus cuts him down to size and makes him realize he isn't even close to figuring out any of this! **Provision: Don't assume to know God's ways.** And anyone who tells you they know God's plans is one of those false prophets we talked about on Monday. We are human beings. We think as humans do. We need to be aware of that when things don't turn out the way we imagine they should. With all the layers of teachings and doctrines and stuff we proclaim to know, faith exists in The Cloud of the Unknowing.

Fri, Aug 9: *"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me"* (Mt 16:24-28). What does it mean to "deny yourself?" Do I fast like I do in Lent? Do I shop less? Could be, but actually, it means exactly what it says: deny that you are the center of your life and instead make Christ the center. **Provision: Look at what centers your life.** If I'm honest, some of the crosses I take up have to do with my own needs or expectations. Look at the crosses you are bearing right now. Are they ones Jesus would have you carry?

Sat, Aug 10: *"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit"* (Jn 12:24-26). Nothing changes for the grain of wheat that does not burst forth from its seed cover to become what God intends—food for others. It rots away, swept up with the dust. **Provision: Pray for the courage to be what God intends.** We've talked this week about how our egos, expectations, and self-centeredness can get in the way of being the person God made us to be. It takes courage and self-awareness to leave the old, comfortable shell and burst forth as a new creation. Pray today for that courage.