

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."**

July 25, 2021.

Jesus said, **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."** (John 6:35)

A widower had some raspberry bushes in his backyard. The first summer after his wife passed away, a good friend of his wife from his church asked if she could come over and pick raspberries so the plant will produce more fruits. She picked the berries the next morning and returned in the afternoon with a homemade pie, with filling peeking through the golden brown lattice crisscrossing the top, and still warm. He invited her to share the pie. It was marvellously, deliciously perfect. After thanking her for the pie, he packed it up and went to visit a friend to give him a piece of pie. Then he thought of sharing it with someone who would not only enjoy a piece of the pie, but actually needed it. He spent the rest of the day sharing the pie, a simple pleasure of summer taste, a symbol of love and care. **He and those with whom he shared it found that even a small piece could convey the essence of it: sunshine, earth, abundance, creativity, compassion. He came to think of it as communion by pie. It was a kind of grace that conveyed the knowledge that he was part of a larger community and that connection was part of what he hungered for.** Pie is not bread. **A good homemade pie says indulgence in a way that most common loaves of bread do not unless one is truly hungry.** But a good homemade loaf can also remind us of humble elements transformed: flour, salt, yeast, maybe some egg to glaze the crust. Attention to the ingredients connects us to a web of labor and labourers whose efforts make this food possible. We may even catch a glimpse of generations past whose ingenuity and fortitude laid the foundation for the bread before us. We could go all the way back to ancient times when people dependent upon bread for their daily sustenance. **Immigrants packed their trunks with wheat seeds when they journeyed to the great plains of North America. Refugees sewed seeds into the hems of their skirts and their children's shirts for the voyage so the new life they longed for would be sustainable in a new home.** They knew that with even a bit of bread, they could be nourished. They knew they could sustain life: **planting, tending, harvesting, milling, mixing, kneading, waiting, shaping, baking, taking, giving thanks, breaking, sharing.**

We meet Jesus in this Sunday's gospel (John 6:1-15) when he has fed the multitudes, using the small contribution from a boy. The crowd is fed symbolizing that Jesus has come to give life to all people. Everyone has had their fill of bread and have had the pleasure of eating enough. But just what is enough? The people Jesus had fed wanted a guarantee that they would always have enough. Jesus's provision of plentiful bread seemed to them something they wanted more of. So they pursued him for they wanted limitless, wonderful, unending bread. Jesus is always showing compassion for the people. He fed hungry people. He knew people need to eat. He told his followers to feed people, real, physical, tangible, nutritious food. But he also promised that he himself would be enough. He didn't want to be just a provider of physical bread. He wants to be our bread, our sustenance, our nourishment, our daily strength, our source of satisfaction. Jesus is bread, but he wants to fill the hunger of our hearts and not just our stomachs. He wants to fill the gnawing, aching emptiness that we try to fill with lesser things, to satisfy the longing or the boredom that we use substances of all sorts to put an end to the grasping, worrying about having enough of anything that will in the end possess us, rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the hands of the one for whom we were made. A deep spiritual hunger is implanted in every human heart. **Different people will seek to fill this need in different ways, but the hunger is not unique. People yearn for a deeper connection, an eternal spiritual connection.**

It is an easy move to connect Jesus referring to himself as the Bread of Life to the Eucharist. **For in the mystery of the Eucharistic feast we eat the bread and drink the wine, and in so doing we partake of the body and blood of Jesus.** But we don't want to jump to that correct response so quickly that we miss the bigger picture. This discourse comes when Jesus has two more years of ministry ahead of him. In fact, this is, after all, John Chapter 6, out of 21 chapters. There is much more time left in Jesus' ministry before he gets to that last meal with his disciples. John's gospel makes clear what the other three gospels only hint at: the Eucharist is not about Jesus' death alone. **Jesus' self-giving act in communion is not only concerned with the Last Supper, the cross and the empty tomb alone. Jesus' whole life, rather than just one or two events, will institute the sacrament of communion.** Put differently, **faith is not in Jesus' death and resurrection alone, but in Jesus' whole life – from Bethlehem to Golgotha, and beyond to an empty tomb in a garden, Jesus' appearances to his disciples, and his ascension to heaven.**

**Jesus is our daily sustenance. He is bread to be savoured, gathered around. Bread to inspire thanksgiving, to remind us of the wonder of life, to strengthen us. Jesus is the living bread that came down from heaven that satisfies the hunger of our body just as he is the living water that quenches our thirst of our soul.** We can contemplate him thoughtfully, chewing slowly, pondering, but we will gain more if we come to him as hungry beggars, open to whatever he places in our outstretched hands. Every day we live in this world is a miracle of God's divine providence, much greater than the feeding of the multitude. We should thank God always not just for our food but for the many blessings and benefits that come our way and which we often take for granted. **Jesus was taken, blessed, and broken. He is to be shared. The sharing of his life invites us to exercise the creativity of an artisan bread-baker and the compassion of a mother sewing seeds into the clothing of her children so they will always have sustenance for the journey. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."**