

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 4/5 – 2012.

Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15, 31; Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24; John 6: 24-35

Introduction

Forty years ago there were only a small number of food banks in Canada; today there are several thousand of them. Without them hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens could not survive. It is not that there is a lack of food in this rich country. What is lacking is a readiness to make the political and economic changes needed so that adequate food and the other necessities of life are available to all as a matter of justice and not just of charity. A society organized in such a way that the poor go hungry and the rich get richer is one that not only causes physical hardship but that also makes it more difficult for both rich and poor to seek the spiritual food that is our greatest need as human beings.

The *readings* today speak of food and so they raise the question: What food am I seeking in life? What is most important to me? When I pray: “Give us this day our daily bread”, what am I really asking for? Some people today use the word “bread” to mean “money”. Is that all we want from life: money, or the things that money can buy? There is no doubt that is a great temptation for us in our culture. It is shocking to find how often even young school children will say: “When I grow up I want to make lots of money.” By way of contrast, some of the Jewish teachers of Our Lord’s day spoke of the Mosaic Law as the real bread we should treasure. Jesus says in today’s *Gospel* that *He* is the Bread of Life. How can we make sure we are seeking the true Bread in our own life? Here are a few suggestions.

Always Remember that People are More Important than Things

The mystery of creation means that each of us has our own distinct created existence. In God’s Plan each of us is unique, with our own gifts, our own abilities and our own personal history. From all eternity God gave each one of us a unique place in his Plan. Each one of us has been personally *forgiven* by God. Each of us is dearly *loved* by God. Each of us is made for God and will find real fulfillment only in God. Many people of faith in prison camps and concentration camps during the Second World War experienced this truth; it is what kept them going in those terrible places. All this helps us understand why, in the words of Pope John Paul II, we must pursue “the primacy of the human person in the productive process, the primacy of people over things.” This principle needs to guide all our economic policies and our attitudes, as individual persons and as a society. People are more important than things!

Be Aware of the Attachments that We Tend to Substitute for God

In a famous passage, the Scottish poet, Robbie Burns, observes what a wonderful grace it would be if we could see ourselves as others see us. If we could, we would realize that what prevent us from recognizing Christ as the true bread of life are our

attachments. We may be too attached to certain *things* or to particular *persons*. Sometimes we are too attached to *ourselves*, and are so self-centered that our God is really our own self. We may be too attached to our own *will*, even to the point of seeking to dominate situations and to manipulate other people. All these attachments prevent us from acquiring a “taste” for God. It’s one of the reasons why we can find it hard to pray. In a capitalist economy like our own, we are surrounded by seductive advertising that tends to steal our heart away from God. We need constant vigilance and a great spirit of generosity to combat the lure of money and things.

Strengthen Our Commitment to God’s Will

One of the great moments of conversion for many people is when they realize and accept the fact that we live in God’s world. So ultimately all that matters is that God’s will be done. What is important is that we be at God’s disposal, and that we ask ourselves regularly: “What does God want of me?” That question should determine our attitude to everything else. Our Catholic Social Teaching reminds us of this truth when it warns us of the danger of letting our work become just a “job” or even a “career” instead of seeing it as our “calling”. Having a real sense of “calling” in life helps us stay focused on seeking the true “Bread” in life.

Our question should always be, “What does God want of me?” That question helps us take a proper and balanced approach to money and possessions. Let me illustrate this with a true story. When St. Francis Xavier, the great 16th century missionary, first went to Japan, he wore old clothes that had seen many years of use. As a man whose concern was simply to do God’s will, he had no interest in possessing flashy clothes. But when he appeared this way in the Japanese court, people laughed at him and treated him scornfully instead of listening to his message about Christ. So the next time he went to the Japanese court he wore the rich regalia of an ambassador, and this time he was well-received and given a hearing. Here is a perfect example of treating everything in our life simply as a means of doing the will of God and seeking the Lord as our only true “Bread”.

Conclusion

Each week at Mass we profess our faith. But we must never forget that what our faith is really about is not just accepting a number of truths with our mind. It is even more a matter of being truly, personally, committed to a Person, Jesus Christ. Have you noticed that so many people today seem to feel they have to write their autobiography – sports figures, movie stars, broadcasters and others. They all want to leave us a record of what *they did in life*. However when the great St. Augustine wrote his famous book, *The Confessions*, it was not about what he had done, but about what God had done in his life, and about what God continues to do. How truly appropriate this is. After all, it is Jesus who is the Bread of Life!