

“THE BREAD OF LABOR”
SUNDAY ORDINARY 18 B
FOR AUGUST 1, 2021 –ST. PATRICK CATHOLIC CHURCH

We work for food. We work hard.
We get money for our work.
And money?
We sometimes call it “bread.”
In fact, an advertisement for the Missouri lottery
used to call winning the lottery “our daily bread.”

We work for salvation, too.
We produce, we practice virtue,
we follow the rules, we do what’s required.
Sometimes this allows us to think
that we actually earn salvation.

Still, we die. We perish.
The things that sustain us perish with us.
All that belongs to the earth
goes back to the earth.
All the physical bread, having once fed us,
feeds the rest of the food chain.

The old self, St. Paul reminds us
in his letter to the Ephesians,
deteriorates through illusion and desire.

But Moses spoke about another bread.
It wouldn’t fill the stomach
like the Egypt’s fleshpots did.

It would be bread from heaven,
God's promise, a sheer gift,
always there like snow on the ground.

Jesus in John's Gospel is warning us
not to work for perishable food.
There is another kind of bread,
the bread of our destiny,
a "food that endures for eternal life."

So, the people asked Jesus to perform a sign
that they might believe.
The eternal bread would be the sign –
the new manna,
the new bread,
the new bountiful gift from God.

Jesus himself is to be our sustenance,
and that is the work of God.
"I am the bread of life. whoever comes to me will never hunger,
and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

That is not easy to believe, to say the least.
It demands a great effort for us
to let go of the illusion that we
can ultimately feed or save ourselves.
But this faith is precisely what Christ requires of us.

When the crowd asks Jesus what they must do
to perform the works of God,
he makes it very clear: "This is the work of God,

that you believe in the one he sent.”

If there is any pre-eminent task for us
as we celebrate the Eucharist, then,
it is not that we execute it well
or work out our different roles,
as priest,
or deacon,
or lector,
or extraordinary minister of holy communion,
helpful as these things may be.

Our task is to believe that our God, in Jesus,
is our very food and drink.

The liturgy is not just a **meal** we have made,
not just **fellowship**,
not something we have **artistically dreamed up**.

Its reality does not depend upon our ingenuity or virtue,
our expertise in preaching or singing.
It is fundamentally an act and gift of God.

Our act and gift in return is to **receive** it,
to **be nourished** by it,
to **believe** it.

What a sacred responsibility we are given -
but yet it becomes a part of who we are.

It's not an easy task,

our faith – our calling.

Our generation is not the first to balk
at Christ's promise to be our real food.

Remember this question?

“How can he give us his flesh to eat?”

That was the response that many made to him.

We too, in our own days of discipleship,
when it is difficult to believe so lavish a miracle,
are invited to offer a response.

My sisters and brothers,
such is the work before us,
as momentarily we will profess what we believe,
and receive the bread of life from this altar.

Thanks to Fr. John Kavanaugh, SJ for his ideas.