



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 25 July 2021

Pentecost 9

Let us join together in worship before God, reminding ourselves of the divine power of good, wholeness and healing.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?'" John 6:5

An Illustration to set the scene

It was a good question – for the disciples then, and for us today.

Where are we to obtain bread?

Living bread, bread by which to live? And what value do we put on it?

The writer Victor Hugo tells the story of how, just after the French Revolution, a French army corporal and an officer come across a woman and two young children hiding in some bushes.

They are obviously very frightened and appear to be starving.

The officer takes a loaf of bread from his knapsack and gives it to the woman.

She immediately breaks it in two, gives half to each of the children, but leaves none for herself.

As the children tear ravenously at the bread the corporal looks at his officer and says, “Is that because she’s not hungry?”
“No,” replies the officer, “it’s because she is a mother.”

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Whether that bread was stale or living mattered little to the woman.

What mattered to her was that her children were being fed.

For Jesus, up a mountain in Galilee, something similar mattered, although on a different scale of human need.

Approaching him was a large crowd, not just attracted by the stories of his healing powers, but a crowd motivated against their hated Roman masters.

A practical problem, though, was looming.

Sometime soon they would all need something to eat.

Providentially, a little boy was there with his packed lunch but everyone knew that the five barley loaves and two fish would not go very far among five thousand people.

Everyone, that is, except Jesus.

What happened next is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, and in many ways the most meaningful, pointing both forward and back in time.

It points back to God’s miraculous feeding of Israel in the desert, the raining of manna from heaven as described in Exodus.

It points forward to what Jesus did with the five loaves and the two fish.

He gave thanks, and gave the food to the people.

Just as he did at the Last Supper with his disciples.

The Gospel narrative tells us that everyone’s hunger was satisfied.

Not only that, there was food left, more than they started with, and the number of baskets containing the leftovers was significant.

It was twelve, equal to the number of the tribes of Israel.

The leftovers are not only significant, they constitute the real message of the miracle.

Heavenly food is food that lasts – the food of eternal life.

It has an inherent sufficiency – always with something left over.

If we have a need, God will provide.

And not only sufficiency, but heavenly food has synergy – the end product is greater than the constituent parts.

The parts have an energy by which they replicate, multiply themselves and overflow.

This is how the multiplied loaves should be understood, not just the result of an act of compassion by Jesus to satisfy the crowd's physical needs.

God's abundance is for all our needs, not just the needs of our stomachs.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

We will never run out of the bread of heaven.

The future will take care of itself, will be alright for our children as long as we are not greedy today.

God doesn't approve of stockpiling for our own benefit to the detriment of others' needs.

God dislikes any tendency to grasp and hoard, to own and not to share.

As we leave our places of worship today, inevitably what we call the "real world" reclaims us.

We will have had our spiritual food and lots of earthly food awaits – arguably too much of it for some.

But we can count on God's spiritual nourishment – the bread of heaven – being available to us on a 24/7 basis, not just one day in seven.

And God's will is that the bread and the word be available to all – to millions of people in infertile and impoverished places, not just to those in green and pleasant lands.

Jesus' insistence that all the fragments should be picked up from the ground, that nothing should be left behind, is symbolic of his intention that no soul should be lost to the kingdom of heaven.

“When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’” John 6:5

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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