



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 8 August 2021

Pentecost 11

We gather together today to worship God, who creates and sustains the universe. We will be nourished by the word of God, and reminded that Jesus is the bread of life, and that if we believe in him we will have eternal life.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." *John 6:35*

An Illustration to set the scene

The first appearance of bread in the archaeological record may be as long ago as thirty thousand years, when starchy grains and roots were ground on primitive quern (grinding) stones – or hand grinders – before being cooked on rocks heated in the fire.

With the introduction of domesticated cereals – wheat and barley – in Mesopotamia some ten thousand years ago, something that we might recognise as bread was created.

Grain was ground and made into a paste with water. This paste was then cooked on hot stones to make flatbreads.

Leavening – the process by which bread dough is made fluffy and increases in volume – was initially the result of wild airborne yeasts colonising the grain paste, and feeding on the starches in a process of fermentation. *(And that is how we make sour dough – which you may have tried during the first lock-down last year!)*

To make the results a little more reliable, some of the previous batch of dough, with its yeasts, was introduced to the next batch, a process which we still use today in sourdough.

By 500 BC the commercial production of yeast had been perfected and a wide range of breads was being produced throughout the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and beyond, both at home and by professional bakers.

Bread, especially wheat bread, had become the staple of the human diet across much of the world, and remains so to this day. It became fundamental to the survival of the human species, fuelled population growth, and life without it was unimaginable.

It was the very stuff of life.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Earlier in this chapter of John's Gospel Jesus fed the five thousand, miraculously providing such an abundance of bread that the leftovers filled twelve baskets.

When the people come to him afterwards, Jesus accuses them of having been converted only because they had eaten their fill of the loaves.

But those who have heard his claim, to be sent by God to be the bread that gives eternal life, are unable to see past the fact that he is a local boy, whose parents they know.

How can he be sent by God?

Jesus is unequivocal – he claims to have seen God, a unique experience, because he has come down from heaven to bring to humanity bread that is not only life-giving, but brings eternal life.

Jesus was using a metaphor which each of his listeners would have understood completely – just as their lives depend on the sustenance provided by bread, so their eternal life depends on the sustenance provided by the bread of life sent from God in Jesus.

The account of the Last Supper later in John's Gospel does not contain the details which are in the other three Gospels, and on which the words of institution at the Eucharist are based.

There is no equivalent of "*Take, eat; this is my body*" (as in Matthew 26:26).

Yet the same idea is encapsulated in Jesus' words when he says: "*the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*".

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The need for food is a profound imperative in the lives of all humans.

To live, we must eat.

But, as Jesus taught, "*one does not live by bread alone*" (from Matthew 4:4) and human life is more than simply bread and biology.

To "*have life, and have it abundantly*" (from John 10:10) **we need nourishment that is spiritual as well as physical.**

If we say that we believe in Jesus, that he is the bread of life sent by the Father, then we have certain responsibilities.

Obviously we must ensure that we, and all people, have enough food to sustain physical life.

In a world where production exceeds demand it is an offence to God's abundance that people still go hungry, while some have more than they could ever need.

To waste food which the land has given and human hands have made is a blasphemy against God's creation.

But also, **we must be mindful of the need to feed our souls, as** well as our bodies, with the word of God and the sacraments of the Church.

The Eucharist has been given to us by Jesus to feed us, body and soul, both with the bread that we take and eat, and with his life-giving body which came down from heaven.

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." John 6:35

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's 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?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk