

20 Year B – Bread of Life

Bread, the staple of Western diet, has a short shelf life. Within a day or two fresh loaves harden and soon begin to mould. Pre-sliced packaged bread fares somewhat better because of all the preservatives, but it, too, soon develops telltale green spots if not kept in the freezer. Whether the bread is stale or has come straight from the oven it only relieves our hunger temporarily. We soon begin to feel peckish again - even after eating our fill.

Jesus describes himself as the *Bread of Life*. He offers us food that never spoils or leaves us hungry. In the Eucharist He offers us Himself as food for our soul. He gives us **courage** to work for justice, **compassion** to reach out to suffering humanity, the **strength** to serve those who need our support however demanding they may be. He offers us **wisdom**, **fortitude**, **piety**...and all other **spiritual** gifts.

Without such bread we will be spiritually malnourished.

Without such bread to sustain us it is easy for us to seek our satisfaction in consumerism, in material possessions – and remain empty within, empty of heart.

Without such bread it is all too easy for us to place ourselves, not God, at the centre of the universe.

Our understanding of the Eucharist may be limited to what we were able to take in when we were being prepared for our First Communion. Some of the older ones among us were taught to avoid touching the host or even chewing it for fear of committing sacrilege! Reverence for Jesus presence was instilled in such a way that receiving Him in the Sacrament was a time of anxiety as much as joyful anticipation.

A later generation learned that the Lord's Supper was a special Meal, with Jesus, our Brother in humanity, inviting, welcoming and serving us at the gathering. Or that in receiving Holy Communion we are offering a 'home to Jesus'. These notions reduced anxiety – but they also brought about a somewhat casual attitude towards the sacrament. This attitude is still in evidence when people behave without due reverence in Church and receive Holy Communion without a qualm, even after long or regular absences.

Each approach has its shortcomings: there is either a lack of confidence or a lack of respect.

In the Eucharist **Jesus** offers himself to **us** so that we may share in **his** life, see with **his** eyes, reach out with **his** hands, love with **his** heart – so that we may transform the world according to **his** vision for it.

Our celebration of the Eucharist should help us to **become** Christ.

Our celebration of the Eucharist nurtures us with the very presence of Christ so that we can live as he lived and, if necessary, die as he died.

This is truly a challenge, and to respond to such an invitation requires courage indeed.

Perhaps it is the real reason why so many turned away from him in the Gospel story – and still do today.

Lord, give us yourself - the bread of life - that we may live to the full.

O God of love, help us to be brave and give this bread to a hungry world.