

Bulletin Reflection 2021.07.25. Year B1. Week 17. Ordinary Time.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

They ate bread which Jesus multiplied. So impressed they were, that they tried to crown him right then and there.

Well, so what?

Afterwards, Jesus laid bare their motive: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you had your fill of the loaves.” (Jn 6:26) In their estimation, they couldn’t go wrong with a king who would save them from hunger. But little did they realise history was repeating itself, for during the Exodus the Lord had rained down manna from heaven. But how did their forebears respond? They fretted and complained, because they got sick of it.

Admittedly, we don’t need the Scriptures to realise how hard it is to please people. Offer them bread and soon they’ll ask for meat. Give them a talent and they’ll want nine more. Truth is, human beings will never be satisfied with temporal things. Yet we keep placing a futile hope, when in fact true and lasting fulfilment is only found in supernatural delights. The Israelites were no different in this tendency as they kept focusing on the gift rather than the giver. Likewise for the manna, once its novelty wore out their awe and gratitude quickly turned into rebellion. Similarly, following the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, the people’s response was not faith in Jesus the Saviour, but false hope in bread as the symbol of prosperity and power. So their loyalty was bound to be superficial, unless they believed not in the gift but the giver. However, this wouldn’t be so, as their approval of Jesus was short-lived despite all his marvellous works. Only this time their sin was infinitely worse.

Blinded by the bread of earth, they failed to recognise the Bread of Heaven. Sadly, we often share the same blindness - of not recognising the Lord before his gifts, because we allow ourselves to be distracted by life’s passing pleasures. This applies also to our response to the pandemic. At the moment we are yearning for a swift return to normalcy. But if we recall, was ‘normal’ anything close to perfect? Far from it. And even after this ordeal, there’s no guarantee we’d find ourselves in a better place. If we’re overly fixated on a temporal need, once we have our fill of the loaves, we’d have go elsewhere for the next bite of happiness. On the contrary, the Gospel teaches us to seek genuine and lasting fulfilment by looking for it in the right place. Accordingly, our true joy is not in earthly things - not even in bodily health necessarily - but in Christ who is the Heavenly Bread offered up for our salvation.

The Lord said, “I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” (Jn 6:35) So to whom shall we go, when he has the words of eternal life? (C.f. Jn 6:68) Therefore, above all the one thing we must pray for is to not lose faith, even when our cross feels heavy and burdensome. May the Spirit of Christ be abundant in us, that we may be the instruments with which he continues to feed the multitude.