

Bulletin Reflection 2021.08.01. Year B1. Week 18. Ordinary Time.

“No one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Mt 4:4)

It was meant to be a magic show for children. But the magician seemed more interested in preaching to his audience rather than perform magic. This went on for a while until even the supervising adults were running out of patience. Eventually, one kid took courage, put his hand up, and said, “Come on, just show us the rabbit!”

So why the complaint and what was its nature? Is a preachy magician always bad? What about a preacher who performs magic tricks? Within reason, it would seem a magician could offer a few words of wisdom, just as a priest may use a magic trick to expound the Word of God (though not too often). For in storytelling, it’s not unusual to occasionally tap into foreign disciplines for emphasis. However, these devices can only be effective insofar as they assist and not usurp the subject matter. Therefore, just as an overly preachy magician isn’t desirable, a priest who likes to perform rather than preach may soon face the multiplication of voices: “Come on, just get on with the Mass!”

In the Gospel a large crowd sought Jesus after he multiplied bread and walked on water. But was it because they recognised him to be the Son of God or a miracle worker? Was he seen as a preacher or a performer? The Bread of Life or the bread multiplier? Alas, it was the latter. He offered everlasting life, but they wanted everlasting gratification of their appetites. But how could they be so blind? We know that the senses demand far more attention than the spirit. Tangible miracles such as the multiplication of loaves would turn the heads of the fiercest sceptics. But a teaching on Jesus’ Real Presence? Even the eyewitnesses who had their fill of bread couldn’t stomach that!

Inexplicably they said, “What work will you do? Our father had manna to eat in the desert.” What work will he do? Was the feeding of the multitude still not enough? More signs. More miracles. This was their main obsession. So the Lord chose not to satisfy their worldly desires by declaring instead: “I am the Bread of Life.” For the bread-chasers this couldn’t be more anti-climactic after such an eye-catching prelude. But for those who were spiritually disposed this would be challenging yet also enlightening and affirming. For if Jesus was truly the Bread of Life, whoever believed in him would never have to hunger or thirst.

Isn’t it interesting that most left as soon as Jesus offered the key to eternal life? Admittedly for those who only saw in Jesus a miracle worker, a preaching magician was never going to cut it. They wanted him to speak less and show more bread, but instead he revealed himself to be the Heavenly Bread, the Bread of Eternal Life. And the result? The most unspectacular conclusion to a spectacular miracle. But was this not a reflection of life’s understated character? Truth is, life is far greater than the sum of its events. Yet our world says otherwise, as it is deemed worthless once the struggles outnumber the pleasures – e.g. the push for euthanasia. Therefore, we must listen to Jesus as he says, “Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life.” In other words, life is far more valuable than the sum of its passing

delights, for God designed it to last for eternity. Indeed, regardless of circumstances, every life is precious to the Lord, because he died to in order to feed us himself. So when we suffer, what do you think will satisfy our hunger and thirst? Will it be Jesus' miracles? Or will Jesus be enough?