

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 1st 2021
A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

Hungers of the Spirit

In last Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus miraculously fed people by multiplying loaves and fishes. In John’s Gospel miracles are usually called signs. In today’s Gospel (John 6:24-35), Jesus asks the people to see the miracle of the bread as a sign of something greater, to move on to the hungers of the spirit. “Do not work for the food that cannot last but work for the food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.” They ask him what are the works that the Father wants from them. Jesus answers, “This is working for God, you must believe in the one he has sent.”

To believe means to belong ... to belong to God in accepting Christ’s teaching, straining for his ideals, and walking the road of life in his company. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And so, when the people ask him for the bread of direction, he proclaims, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

Hunger of the spirit

When Mother Teresa of Calcutta sent some of the Sisters to a deprived area in New York they were startled by a new form of hunger, particularly the hunger of loneliness among old people, living on their own and rarely if ever visited by their family. The hunger which the Sisters were familiar with in Calcutta could be satisfied by bread and rice. The hunger of loneliness had to be fed with a different bread, so the Sisters visited these lonely people, chatted to them, and helped with laundry, cleaning and shopping.

Hunger of the spirit is experienced by people who have been abandoned, abused, rejected, mocked or deprived of human dignity in one way or another.

Jesus touched on another hunger in one of the Beatitudes. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall have their fill.” This hunger is the yearning for social justice, for peace in every land and for a fair sharing of the wealth of the world.

Thirst of the mind

If the emptiness of the heart can be called a hunger, the searching of the mind can be called a thirst. Thirst for a meaning to life, thirst for a future, thirst for truth, and for a solid foundation to life.

The Good Shepherd will guide his followers along the right path for he is true to his name. Sadly, many people have drifted away from Christ. Just listen to the disrespect for Jesus Christ in the thoughtless way the sacred names are used. It is no longer Christ who is guiding people but false shepherds.

The aimless lives of pagans

In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul urges people not to go on living the aimless kind of life that the pagans live. When the light of faith weakens in any country, murders multiply, crime rates soar, there is less respect for life on every level, less stability in marriage, more dependence on drugs, abortion of life is legalized, and perhaps saddest of all, more suicides. There is a nagging thirst for a meaning to life, for hope, for stability, for everlasting love and inner peace.

There are many changes in society, some for the better but many for the worse.

Saved by a Person

At the beginning of the new millennium, Pope John Paul II wrote an Apostolic Letter encouraging us to a fresh start, a new impetus in Christian living, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith. He was well aware that there are many problems to be faced and new questions to be answered. Some people wonder if we need a new formula, but he replied that we are not saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: "I am with you at all times; yes, to the end of time" (Matt. 28:20).

Having fed the physical hunger of people in the multiplication of loaves and fishes, Jesus urged them to see this miracle a sign to move on to the inner experiences of hunger and thirst. They asked him "What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?" He replied, "You must believe in the one he has sent".

Set your mind and heart on the ideals of Jesus Christ. Believe in him, trust him, enjoy his love and walk the road of life with him.

"I am the bread of life.

*Whoever comes to me will never be hungry;
whoever believes in me will never thirst."*

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you said of yourself, "I am the bread of life." You provided bread for people when you multiplied the loaves and fishes. You moved on to describe yourself as the spiritual bread to satisfy the hungers of the heart and mind. And then you promised to give the bread which would be your flesh offered up on the cross for the life of the world. This is your presence in the Blessed Eucharist. Strengthen our faith. Call back those who have strayed away. Help them to realize what they have been missing.