

## Synopsis: OT XVIII [B] (August2) Homily John 6: 24-35 L/15

Introduction: Today's readings challenge us to trust in the providence of a loving and caring God and to hunger and thirst for the Bread of eternal life – the Holy Eucharist. Only God can satisfy our various forms of spiritual hunger.

Scripture lessons:The first reading shows us how God satisfied the hunger of His chosen people in the desert by giving them manna and quail. The restrictions imposed by God for the collecting of manna remind us to acknowledge humbly our total dependence on God and to trust that He will always provide for what we need. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 78), refers to manna as "*Heavenly bread*" and the "*bread of angels.*" In the second reading, St. Paul advises the Ephesians to satisfy their spiritual hunger by turning away from their former evil ways and leading lives of love, kindness, compassion and forgiveness. Paul reminds us that our acceptance of Jesus as the real source of our life and the nourishment of our souls effects a total transformation in us. Having been nourished by the Bread from Heaven and the word of God, we need to bear witness to Christ by living lives renewed by the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel, Jesus makes the unique and bold claim: "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*" Jesus was offering the crowd Bread from Heaven, Bread that nourishes for eternal life, Bread available to people who have faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus invited those who sought after him for earthly food to be fed, as well, by the Bread of his word or teaching, some accepted the nourishment. But others turned away, disappointed because Jesus' challenge required a commitment that they were unwilling to make.

Life messages: 1) We need spiritual nourishment from the word of God and from the Holy Eucharist: In the Holy Mass, the Church offers us two types of bread: a) the Bread of Life, contained in God's Word and b) the Bread of Life, contained in the Holy Eucharist. Let us nourish our souls with this Heavenly manna and carry Jesus to our homes and workplaces, radiating his love, mercy and compassion all around us. But we should not take for granted the Divine generosity that provides these gifts so readily and gratuitously by sharing in the Bread of Life simply as a matter of habit, without showing due attention and proper respect.

2) We need to accept God's gifts of spiritual life and strength by properly receiving the Holy Eucharist:The Sacrament gives us 1) Courage to carry out God's work in the world, 2) Help to live the life God wants for us, 3) Inspiration to know the will of God in our lives, 4) A deeper Understanding of the holy mystery of Christ's Presence, 5) Encouragement to love others and strengthen the Faith community, 6) Grace to overcome temptation and avoid sin and 7) Joy and Peace of heart, knowing that Christ lives in us and will bring us to God's Heavenly Kingdom. Let us remember that the "Bread of Life" is Jesus Christ himself, not merely human bread. It is Food for our souls giving us a share in God's life and assurance of eternal life with Him.

Anecdotes: # 1: A modern Good Samaritan: A few years ago the news media carried the story of a modern-day Good Samaritan who packed his car each day with dozens of homemade sandwiches and traveled to the inner city to distribute them to homeless and otherwise needy people. Eventually, those who benefited from his generosity became familiar with the Samaritan's customary route and began to congregate on certain corners at a specific time each day to wait for their daily gift of food. Today's Gospel describes such a scene where people who had been sumptuously fed on the previous day by Jesus came searching for him for another free meal.

# 2: All about food, earthly and Heavenly: In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks about food. The two biggest sellers in any bookstore, according to Andy Rooney, are the cookbooks and the diet books. The cookbooks tell you how to prepare the food, and the diet books tell you how not to eat any of it. Orson Wells once said, "My doctor has advised me to give up those intimate little dinners for four, unless, of course, there are three other people eating with me." Champion archer Rick McKinney confesses that he regularly eats chocolate chip cookies for breakfast. He refers to "the basic four food groups" as a Big Mac, fries, a shake and a lemon tart. A California scientist has computed that the average human being eats 16 times his or her own weight in an average year, while a horse eats only eight times its weight. This all seems to prove that if you want to lose weight, you should eat like a horse. (*Sunshine Magazine*). That's a subject most of us know too much about. A recent survey found that 41% of men and 55% of women consider themselves overweight. In one way or another, many of us are obsessed with earthly food. Think what a difference it would make in our lives if we were equally obsessed with Heavenly Food, the Food that Christ gives us.

# 3: Cat to kill mice: Once there was a young Hindu hermit who lived as an ascetic in a forest. He owned nothing except a pair of loincloths. One morning, to his great disappointment, he found that mice had destroyed one of the loincloths. He brought a cat to kill the mice and then a cow to give milk to the cat. Later, as the cows multiplied, he hired a girl from the nearby village to look after the cows and to sell the extra milk in the village. Finally, his ever-growing material needs prompted him to end his religious life, marry the girl and settle down as a farmer in the village. This little story illustrates how easily the never-ceasing hunger for material things can take over our spiritual life. In today's Gospel, Jesus promises to satisfy our spiritual hunger by offering His Body as our food.

Introduction: Today's readings challenge us to trust in the providence of a loving and caring God and to hunger and thirst for the Bread of eternal life – the Holy Eucharist. As human beings, we hunger for many things besides food and material possessions. We

hunger to be recognized and honored, to love and be loved, to be listened to and to be appreciated, to help, console and encourage people and receive gratitude. But only God can satisfy our various forms of spiritual hunger. St. Augustine said: "O God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." (*Confessions*,

The first readings shows us how God satisfied the hunger of His chosen people in the desert by giving them manna and quail. The restrictions imposed by God for the collecting of manna remind us to trust that God will always provide for our needs. Sometimes we have to be stripped of our usual sources of support in order to be reminded that our ultimate sustenance comes only from God, and then to acknowledge humbly our total dependence on God. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 78), refers to manna as "*Heavenly bread*" and the "*bread of angels*." In the second reading, St. Paul advises the Ephesians to satisfy their spiritual hunger by turning away from their former evil ways and leading lives of love, kindness, compassion and forgiveness. Paul reminds us that our acceptance of Jesus as the real source of our life and the nourishment of our souls effects a total transformation in us.

Having been fed on the Bread from Heaven, we need to put aside our old selves, steeped in ignorance and self-interest, and put on a new self, created in Christ's image. Having been nourished by the word of God, we need to bear witness to Christ by living lives renewed by the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel, Jesus makes the unique and bold claim: "*I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me will never hunger, and whoever believes in Me will never thirst*." Jesus was offering the crowd Bread from Heaven, Bread that nourishes for eternal life, Bread available to people who have faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus invited those who sought after him to be fed spiritually by the bread of his word or teaching, some accepted the nourishment. But others turned away, disappointed because Jesus' challenge required a commitment that they were unwilling to make.

First reading, Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15: The passage from Exodus describes how the people complained to Moses of the acute shortage of food in the desert and accused him of leading them from Egypt, where food was plentiful, into the desert, "to die of famine." God heard the complaint of His people and lavished on them "food from heaven" in the form of fleshy quails in the evening and delicious manna in the morning. The restrictions imposed by God for collecting the manna remind us to trust that God will always provide what we need. Sometimes we have to be stripped of our usual sources of support in order to remember that our ultimate sustenance comes only from God, and to acknowledge humbly our total dependence on God. The fact that the Israelites were given bread from Heaven even after their murmuring reminds us that God's generosity is not dependent on our virtue, but on His Goodness. According to Bible scholars, quails and manna are occasional phenomena in the Sinai desert. Arranging for these gifts to arrive at the moment they were needed to meet the people's need, however, was God's work alone, His miracle. The quail might have been migratory birds that often drop down in groups to the Sinai deserts due to exhaustion after their return flight from Europe over the Mediterranean Sea to their autumn habitats. Manna is the secretion of two species of scale insects on the tamarisk shrub during

the months of May and June. But it was God's doing that the fall of manna occurred daily (except Sabbaths), for the 40 unbroken years of their wandering in the desert. As the secretions drop from the shrub's leaves to the ground, they cool in the night air and become firm. If gathered early before the parching desert sun melts it, the manna provides a tasty, nourishing meal. Bedouins in the northern Sinai call it *mann* and still use it as a sweetener. The fact that the occasional occurrence of the manna and quail can be explained scientifically does not, in any way, lessen their theological importance in demonstrating God's love for His people; indeed, the Israelites rightly ascribed these nourishing, timely gifts from the desert to the loving providence of their God.

Second Reading, Ephesians 4:17, 20-24: In the selections from Ephesians which we have read on these past two Sundays, St. Paul showed us how God effected the new unity of God's once separated peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, by making both Christians. In today's second reading, St. Paul encourages the Jewish and Gentile Christians to live out the consequences of their unification, by treating each other like members of one family. He also demands of the Gentile Christians of Ephesus radical changes from their pre-Christian way of life. They must a) *"put away the old self of their former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires,"* b) *"be renewed in the spirit of their minds,"* and c) *"put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth."* They must put away the old pagan life and put on the new Christian life, just as the catechumens divested themselves of their outer garments to go down into the Baptismal waters and, after emerging, were clothed in Baptismal robes. Here, St. Paul is challenging all baptized believers to personal holiness.

Exegesis: The context: Today's Gospel presents an introduction to Jesus' famous discourse on the Holy Eucharist in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews who had gone around the Lake and come to Capernaum searching for him. The people were looking for a repeat performance of their miraculous feeding. In answer to their question about his arrival, Jesus told them that they looked for him for another free meal and that such meals would not satisfy them. Hence, he instructed them to labor for food that would give them eternal life.

Believing is the first condition: Although Jesus identifies himself as "the bread of life" (v. 35), he is not yet speaking about the Sacramental Eucharist in this part of his Eucharistic discourse. Here, the emphasis is placed on the faith-acceptance of the teaching of Jesus. In other words, Jesus states that he is nourishment, first of all, as one who offers us the life-giving words of God about the meaning of our lives. His message only gives life when we accept it and when it leads us from selfishness to selfless and sacrificial service for others. Jesus states that he is the bread of life for the one who "comes" to him and "believes" in him (v. 35). Jesus offered to satisfy the spiritual hunger of the people gathered around him on one condition. They must believe him to be the Messiah, sent with the message that God is a loving, holy, and forgiving Father, and not a punishing judge. Belief in Jesus is not simple intellectual assent, but an authentic, total commitment to Him of loyalty and

solidarity. There is no reference yet to eating or drinking his body and blood, which will come later. Here, we are reminded that only a believing reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus will bring us true life.

Demand for a sign from Heaven: In reply to Jesus' claim that he was the Messiah sent from Heaven to give eternal life to those who believed in him, the Jews demanded a sign from Heaven. Moses, they said, had given a Heavenly sign to their ancestors in the manna rained down on them from Heaven. The Jewish rabbis taught that the Messiah would repeat the miracle of manna and the prophet Jeremiah would reappear and unearth the Ark of the Covenant from its hidden place to show the Jews the original manna kept in the Ark. Jesus corrected their understanding of Exodus 16:15 by stating that it was not Moses but God, Jesus' Father Who had given, and continued to give, bread from Heaven. Now, Jesus not only gives the Bread of Life (John 6:11, 27), but also is the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48). The giver and the gift are one and the same. As the Bread of Life from Heaven, Jesus claims that only he can satisfy man's spiritual hunger. While bodily food helps us to stay alive in this world, spiritual food sustains and develops our supernatural life which will last forever in heaven. Through God's infinite love we are given, in the Blessed Eucharist, the very Author of the gifts of faith and sanctifying grace. Thus, the Eucharist is not a mere "symbol" of Jesus; rather, it is a Sacramental sign of Jesus' Real Bodily Presence in his glorified risen Body. This Bread of Life -- which is Jesus himself -- gives mankind a new relationship with God, a relationship of trust, obedience and love.

**"The source and summit of the Christian Life:"** We believe that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian Life" (*Lumen Gentium*), because it contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Jesus Christ himself. The Eucharist is a *Sacrament of love* that unites us with Christ who lived, died and rose again to bring us salvation, strengthens and makes holy our relationship with our fellow-Christians, nourishes us with the transforming power of grace and prepares us for the future glory of God's Heavenly banquet.

Life messages: 1) We need spiritual nourishment from the word of God and from the Holy Eucharist: In the Holy Mass, the Church offers us two types of bread: a) the Bread of Life, contained in God's Word and b) the Bread of Life, contained in the Holy Eucharist. Unfortunately, many of us come to Mass every week to present on the altar only our earthly needs without accepting spiritual nourishment by properly receiving God's Word and the Holy Eucharist. Let us nourish our souls with this Heavenly manna and carry Jesus to our homes and workplaces, radiating his love, mercy and compassion all around us. It is perhaps the plainness and ordinariness of the consecrated Bread and Wine and their easy availability in our Churches that sometimes prevent some of us from appreciating the great gift of God in the Holy Eucharist. But we should not take for granted the Divine generosity that provides these gifts so readily and gratuitously by sharing in the Bread of Life simply as a matter of habit and without showing due attention and proper respect.

2) Let us gain spiritual life and strength by properly receiving the Holy Eucharist: It gives us  
1) Courage to carry out God's work in the world, 2) Help to live the life God wants for us,  
3) Inspiration to know the will of God in our lives, 4) A deeper Understanding of the holy  
mystery of Christ's presence, 5) Encouragement to love others and strengthen the Faith  
community, 6) Grace to overcome temptation and avoid sin, and 7) Joy and Peace of heart,  
knowing that Christ lives in us and will bring us to God's Heavenly Kingdom. Hence, we  
must receive the Holy Eucharist with our whole minds and hearts. Let us never forget that  
the "Bread of Life" is Jesus Christ himself, not merely human bread. When we pray, "*give us  
this day our daily bread,*" let us remember that the *Holy* Eucharist is not simply a "snack,"  
such as we might eat at a party or at lunch. It is food for our souls giving us a share in  
God's life.

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