

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

Last Sunday's account of the miracle of the loaves happened on the far side of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, this week's reading is the beginning of Jesus' discourse on the bread of life back in the synagogue in Capernaum. He tells the people who have followed him back, to search for the food that endures to eternal life. They ask for this food and Jesus replies saying: 'I am the bread of life.' The first reading tells of the Israelites complaining in the wilderness that they have no food and how God feeds his people through Moses' intercession. The second reading continues from Ephesians. Following last week's call to unity Paul next urges the Ephesians to live their lives according to what they have been taught about Christ Jesus.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the birth and call of Moses and the deliverance of the Israelite people from Egypt and then the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes predominantly from the Priestly tradition with its emphasis on the observance of the Sabbath, read the whole of ch.16 if you have time.

The reading, 16.2-4,12-15, comes from the journey to Mt Sinai, the Israelites have barely set out from the Red Sea (see v.1.) when they start complaining to Moses, they miss the 'flesh pots' of Egypt. Immediately we see the Israelites must have faith and trust in their God who has brought them out of Egypt. The food that Yahweh supplies must be collected as God's law demands. God feeds his people with quails in the evening and manna in the morning, not knowing what the manna was Moses told them 'That is the food which Yahweh has given you to eat.' The Israelites learn that Yahweh is their God who has fed them not Moses. The gospel readings over the next four weeks teach us that Jesus, the new Moses, feeds us with the true bread from heaven and like the Israelites we must learn to have faith and trust in God.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 77.3-4,23-25,54, is a meditation on the history of Israel, the selected verses, given to us today, help us reflect on the teaching of the first reading. The first verse shows that we need to learn from God's past deeds and hand on the lessons learnt to our children. The next verse speaks of the food God sent his people in their need, for us the bread from heaven that we eat is the true Body and Blood of Christ which if received with faith will bring us to God's holy land.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. If you have time read the whole of this wonderful letter, it's only six chapters long. The letter was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (61-63 A.D.) and he follows what he taught in Colossians about the subordinate place of the powers of the universe by teaching that God 'has put all things under his (Christ's) feet and made him the head of the Church which is his Body, the fullness of him who is filled, all in all.' He then deals with the continuous problem of Jew and gentile. Salvation is a gift given by God through Christ and this salvation is available equally to Jew and gentile, this shows something of the infinite wisdom of the mystery of God's inexhaustible love. In the last analysis God's plans are seen to be fulfilled in Christ, and in the Church, the extension of Christ through history. This unity in Christ is incompatible with any lack of charity for their attitude to each other is the measure of their attitude to Christ, in whom all are one.

The reading, 4.17,20-24, follows Paul's call for unity we read about last week with teaching directed at each of us personally, we mustn't live 'empty-headed' lives, lives with no purpose, as if we have failed to hear the message of Christ properly. If we are determined to follow Jesus our lives will have to experience 'a spiritual revolution' you are 'to put aside your old self, which belongs to your old way of life and is corrupted by following illusory desires.' Rather, Paul teaches, 'your mind must be renewed in spirit so that you could put on the New Man that has been created on God's principles, in uprightness and holiness of the truth.' Paul tells us we cannot be half-hearted about being followers of Christ. A spiritual revolution no less! Christ wasn't half-hearted in all he did for us.