

FR. PETER'S SUNDAY HOMILY
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

If you or I found a source of free, unlimited food, we would certainly seek out that source and try to "capture" it so that we would never have to work for a meal again.

It's human nature.

That is just what the crowd tried to do after Jesus had multiplied the loaves and fishes for them.

But Jesus challenges them (and us): "Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you."

Jesus is saying: "You are focusing on filling your stomach, but you will never be truly satisfied unless you focus on feeding your soul."

The crowd then asks what they can do to "earn" this kind of food.

Jesus explains that the food he gives requires more than just fulfilling a few precepts ... they must believe in the One whom God has sent.

In other words, to be fed spiritually, they must enter into a relationship with Jesus and be fully committed to him.

"Well, not so fast," the crowd says. "What sign can you perform for us that we may see and believe?"

Really? Jesus just fed them with five loaves and two fish, and now they need another sign?

They want Jesus to make it rain bread just as Moses did for their ancestors in the desert.

With the mention of the manna, the bread from heaven, Jesus has the opening to challenge the crowd to deepen their understanding.

He explains: "Moses did not give the manna; God gave it."

"Moreover, the manna was a sign of the true bread from heaven God wanted to give his people, the bread that would give life to the world."

That sounds pretty good to the crowd, who - as usual - misunderstand what Jesus is saying.

Thinking he is promising them an endless free meal ticket, they say: "Give us this bread always."

Now comes the moment of revelation.

Jesus declares: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Jesus is God's life-giving Word come down from heaven.

The manna in the desert, the water from the rock, even the multiplied loaves and fishes

...

... were all signs of the true "food" God sends: Jesus his Son, the source of eternal life. Jesus offers himself as this "food" to those who receive him through faith.

Let's return to the reference to the manna in the desert.

For Christians, there is much symbolism in the Exodus account of God freeing his chosen people from slavery in Egypt and feeding them on their way to the Promised Land.

For Christians, the crossing of the Red Sea foreshadows Baptism, and the feeding with Manna prefigures the Eucharist.

When we were baptized, we were freed from slavery to sin ... or in the words of St. Paul, we died to our "old self" and put on a "new self," formed in the image of Jesus Christ.

After Baptism we set out on our journey to the Promised Land. As we mature, this journey can be difficult and become wearisome.

That is why Jesus gives us strength and nourishment through the bread of Life, the Eucharist, so that we can make the daily decision to follow Jesus so that we do not fall prey to the temptations of a "pagan" life.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul is writing to newly converted Christians who are living in a pagan culture.

There was much temptation to fall back into their former way of living.

It is not an easy thing to follow Jesus and his counter-cultural Gospel way of life.

Like the Israelite community in the First Reading, the Ephesians - and we - can grow tired of the journey and begin to long for the "fleshpots of Egypt."

Every time we sin we are choosing the bondage of Egypt rather than trusting in God's providential grace.

If we want to live out our baptism, we have to decide each day to "put away the old self with its evil desires."

We have to turn to Jesus every day "to be renewed in the spirit of our minds."

The Eucharist reminds us not to "work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life."

It is faith in Jesus that alone can satisfy our deepest hungers.

We cannot survive the journey to the Promised land without Jesus, our "daily bread."

Jesus is the source of life. He is nourishment for our spirits and strength for our will to follow him.

Moreover, he effects a transformation within us.

In the Eucharist, through the abundant grace and mercy of God, we can become what we eat.

Through our faithful celebration and reception of the Eucharist, we can become more and more like Jesus.

In that way, what we do here on Sunday will make a difference in how we live our lives the rest of the week.