

HOMILY for 20th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's Gospel discusses with us about Jesus as the living bread. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A customer comes into a diner & asks, "Your sign says, '\$50 to anyone who orders something we can't furnish.' I would like to have an elephant ear sandwich."

The waiter responds, "Oh... we're going to have to pay you the \$50."

Customer inquires further, "No elephant ears, huh?"

The waiter answers, "Oh, we've got lots of them... but, we're all out those big buns!"

Anyhow, in the last few Sundays, we've heard about Jesus as the living bread come down from Heaven & His invitation for us to consume Him & find strength & hope for our faith journey. Here's what Jesus talks about it in this Sunday's Gospel, "...I am the living bread that come down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; & the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... Just as the living Father sent me & I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from Heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate & still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." So, Jesus wants us to know that if we consume Him, we will live forever. Because He will give us eternal life & nourish our soul/spirit with divine food. We usually hear about our physical body & perishable food & drink. But, that typical food will eventually run out & cannot nourish our soul/spirit. This is the first time that Jesus points out the soul/spirit to us & the importance of taking good care of it with divine food. We cannot find divine food in our physical world or get it at a grocery store. We got to connect to Jesus if we want to have divine food for our soul/spirit & live forever.

However, some of us come to Mass for more than just nourishing our soul/spirit with the living bread come down from Heaven. We make time for Mass because we want to be around Jesus like we want to be around our friends or people that we love. Or, we want to come to church because this place can help us find peace for our weary soul & its liturgical music can lift up our spirit when we feel anxious or upset about something. Or, we look for a spiritual place like this church to ask God for something or talk to God about some issue that might bother us. I'm sure you could name other reasons for you to search out a Mass or a church like this to spend some time with Jesus each week. That is why a church, particularly the living bread, remains vital not only to the spiritual life of a Christian but also human survival in this world.

Unfortunately, the power of darkness has worked behind the scene to stop us from coming to church or looking for the living bread at Mass. It has tempted us to make up lame excuses for missing Mass or stop visiting a church & spending time with Jesus. It has misled some church leaders & church goers to use a church or a sacred place for political messages & propaganda. You know how Jesus feels about turning a church into a market place or a political rally. He drove business exchangers out of the Temple; & I believe that He would do the same to anyone who wants to turn a church into a political rally instead of a spiritual home for people to meet God. Of course, the power of darkness has tried to discourage people from coming to church & have a divine experience at mass by pointing out the clergy sexual abuse or other mistakes that the Church might have done. In fact, I've seen quite a few articles on the Internet

claiming why church attendance has been down, or why people have no longer considers the value of a good spiritual life for their well-being & happy future.

Realizing how busy the power of darkness has been at work in our world, I'd like to ask you to come up with positive benefits/good reasons for yourself & the world on why church & the living bread is so vital to your daily life & happy future. That way you can remind yourself & tell the world why you love coming to Mass & a sacred place like this church when the power of darkness has tried to discourage you. While you're thinking about that, let me help you reminisce on a couple of occasions that people could not wait to pack in a church & come to Mass.

As you might recall, during COVID shutdown people called & stopped by our church here at all the hours trying to get in to spend some quiet time with Jesus or have a taste of the living bread at Mass. Here at St. Mary Magdalen's Parish we did not make people call in to reserve their seats for Mass, but we took all the necessary (sanitizing) measures to keep people safe for our Mass services. That COVID experience tells us that people always desire spiritual things & want to find ways to be near Jesus even though they might not show it explicitly. Besides COVID time, I remember another occasion that the public has poured into churches & other sacred places was right after September 11 or during time of war & turbulence. Most churches were packed as people looked for peace & protection from God at Masses. I'm reminded how people called in the parish where I was assigned back then & asked if the church would be open for them to drop by to pray during business hours. As you can see, our soul/spirit constantly yearns to be with God especially in troubled times even though the world & the power of darkness wants to distract us & tell us otherwise.

Now, let me tell you one more reason why we should search for Jesus/the living bread & be at church. That reason is shared with us in today's First Reading as following: "Wisdom has built her home, she has set up her seven columns; she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine, yes she has spread her table. She has sent out her maidens, she calls from the heights out over the city: ...Come, eat of my food, & drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding." So, another reason for us to attend Mass & be near Jesus is to find wisdom & figure out God's way for us in our daily life. If we look out into the world these days, we can see lots of foolishness in terms of the choices that people make, or relationships that they have formed for their future. No wonder why we have had so much chaos & violence happen in our world every day. If our world has searched for the wisdom of God, we would see more peace & love in our world.

My dear brothers & sisters, in a modern & secular world like ours, church & spiritual food is the last thing people would think about. But, as I explained above, there are all sorts of benefits & blessings for being close to Jesus & taking in the living bread. Besides, our soul/spirit is always hungry for spiritual food. We just need to feed it & take good care of it. Most importantly, we need to tell the world why church & the living bread is good not only for its soul/spirit but also for everyone in the community.