

# Sunday Homily

## 18<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

2 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“Listen, listen to me and you will have good things to eat and rich food to enjoy.”

### Illustration

We are all too familiar these days with those heart-rending television pictures that show people in the developing world, often tiny children, ravaged by the effects of hunger and thirst. They are a potent reminder that food and drink are among our most basic necessities; without them, we suffer intensely and ultimately we die.

In our first reading today the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, assures his people that their exile will soon be over: the happy future that then awaits them is symbolised by a plentiful supply of food and drink – an abundance of corn, wine and milk – and all free of charge.

### Gospel Teaching

The Gospel reading takes the theme of providing food a stage further. Having heard the tragic news that John the Baptist has been murdered, and no doubt wondering what his own fate might be, Jesus decides to slip across the Lake of Galilee and spend a few quiet hours with his friends. But the huge crowds that have been following him have other ideas. They hurry round the lake on foot so that, as his little boat comes to shore, there they are awaiting him, like a mammoth welcoming committee. The moment he sees them, all thought of solitude vanishes. At once he is at their disposal, eager to help them and to offer those who are sick his healing touch.

By the time evening falls the disciples are at a loss – and, it must be said, in something of a panic – as to how they are going to feed five thousand and more unexpected guests with nothing more than a few loaves and fishes. Jesus seems to brush aside their anxieties as he takes hold of the loaves and fishes and prays over them. Incredibly, as the disciples distribute them to the people, now sitting on the green grass, not only does everyone eat to their heart’s desire, but at the end there are enough scraps left over to fill a dozen baskets. There could scarcely be a more startling proof that God is concerned for those who are hungry; and that for God numbers – five or five thousand – do not matter.

However, there is more than that to the miracle. We can take note not merely of what Jesus does, but of how he does it. He makes the very gestures that one day

will be used in the institution of the Eucharist, gestures that we still see at Mass today. Jesus took the bread and, raising his eyes to heaven, blessed it, broke it and then gave it to the disciples to distribute. In the early Church “the breaking of bread” was another name for the Mass. It is as if Jesus were saying: “This material food, I know, is vital for you – that is why I provide it – but it can never satisfy your deepest hungers. However, there will come a day when I will provide for those needs also.”

## Application

In 1984, on returning from a visit to an Ethiopia devastated by famine, Cardinal Basil Hume told of a memorable meeting he had had with a little Ethiopian boy. The child, an orphan, clutched the cardinal’s hand and was reluctant to let go. After a while he pointed towards his open mouth; there was no need for an interpreter to explain that the child wanted food. Then he gently rubbed his cheek against the cardinal’s hand, again a self-explanatory sign of his desire for affection. The cardinal commented that the youngster was expressing the needs of every man, woman and child – the need for nourishment and the need for love. Without food there is no life; without love there is no life worth having. In the Eucharist we receive the bread of eternal life and the most powerful pledge of boundless love. After all, the sacrifice of the Mass – the body given for us, the blood shed for us – cost Jesus his life.

Today we are being invited to recognise, with joy and gratitude, that in this Mass, as in every Mass, God is offering us food from heaven: food free of charge; food that satisfies our deepest needs; food that is proof of Christ’s overwhelming love, of his desire to accompany us on our journey through life; food that assures us, in the words of St Paul, that no power, no adversity, absolutely nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.