

# The Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15
<i>Response</i>	The Lord gave them bread from heaven.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54
<i>Second Reading</i>	Ephesians 4:17, 20-24
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	One does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 6:24-35

The 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year B continues our journey through John 6. This is the second of five Sundays devoted to this central chapter in the gospel on Jesus' actions during his public ministry that led to the institution of the Eucharist, and that also reveal his real presence in the Eucharist. So for this Sunday the church focuses on the aftermath of the feeding of the 5000. This is in John 6:24 and it says this:

So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Caper'na-um, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then

what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, `He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.<sup>1</sup>

Okay, so what's taking place in this episode of the gospel? A number of things are worth highlighting. First, in terms of geography, Jesus has performed the multiplication of the loaves out in a wilderness, in a lonely place, and now he's come back into town. They've crossed the sea of Galilee back to the town of Capernaum and so when the crowds find him on the other side of the sea the next day they want to know when he came there. That's an allusion to the fact that during the night he crossed the sea by walking on the water. So the lectionary actually skips over the famous account of Jesus walking on the water, but in John's gospel in the full chapter 6, that's the episode that takes place between the feeding of the 5000 and the coming of the crowds and the coming of Jesus to Capernaum. In any case, Jesus responds to them by saying you seek me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. So what he's getting at in that statement, first and foremost, is that in context what they're trying to do is get more free food, and that's basically what he's saying. The reason you're looking for me is not because you saw that the sign, the miraculous feeding of the 5000, and it pointed you to a deeper reality, a deeper truth about who I am, you're

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

coming to me because you ate your fill yesterday and you want more food.

So in that kind of gentle rebuke Jesus goes on to say don't labor for food which perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. Alright so what's Jesus talking about there? Well what he's doing there is he's trying to lead them beyond the earthly food of the loaves that were multiplied and fed to them, to the heavenly food, to the supernatural food that he has not yet given them as Son of Man, which of course is going to be the Eucharist. Now it's important to remember this, that the loaves that were multiplied, although in the previous discussion I emphasized the fact that they were miraculously multiplied, at the same time at the end of the day they were just ordinary bread, they were still bread. It's not yet the true bread from heaven that Christ is going to give in the Eucharist.

Now you might be thinking well wait, how can he expect these people to follow what he's saying when he's saying labor for the food that endures to eternal life that the Son of Man is going to give you? And the answer is really important, it lies in the fact that they've already recognized him as a new Moses. In ancient Jewish tradition at the time of the First Century A.D. there was an expectation that one of the ways you would know who the Messiah was is that he would bring back the miracle of the manna from heaven. There was an expectation that the Messiah, because he would be a kind of new Moses, the prophet like Moses that we saw last Sunday, that he would therefore also return or bring back down from heaven a miraculous bread, this new manna from heaven. So it's in that context that they begin to challenge him about what miracles he's going to perform to show his messianic pedigree so to speak, you know, prove that you are the Messiah. So they ask him and they say, well what must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus says you need to believe in him whom he has sent and they say something absurd,

they say, well what sign do you do that we may see and believe in you, what work do you perform?

Now this is almost comical because just 24 hours before he performed a sign. He fed them with the multiplication of the loaves, with this miraculous bread that he multiplied. So they're pressing him because they want him to perform another miracle, and here's the key verse, here's the challenge they lay before him. They basically say here well our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written, he has given them bread or he gave them bread from heaven, right. So here they quote the Bible to him. They're quoting Exodus 16, which is the account of Moses giving the people the manna from heaven. So what they're doing is they're essentially throwing down the gauntlet, they're in effect saying hey, if you are the Messiah, if you're the new Moses, then we want you to give us manna just like Moses gave the father's manna in the desert. And once they bring up the manna, this is so crucial, once they bring up the manna, that's the segue Jesus uses to lead them into the mystery of the Eucharist and the mystery of his identity as the true manna from heaven, the new manna from heaven, the new manna of the Messiah. So he corrects them slightly and says well actually it wasn't Moses who gave you bread, it was ultimately God who gave you the manna from heaven. Then he says that the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, and they respond to that by saying Lord give us this bread always.

Now notice that, that's a second challenge here. Any First Century Jew would've known that in the Old Testament the miracle of the manna is a temporary miracle. In the book of Exodus 16 they begin to receive the manna after leaving Egypt, but once they get to the promised land 40 years later in the Book of Joshua 4 & 5, the miracle of the manna ceases, right. It's not coming down from heaven anymore. So the miracle lasts for 40 years, it's just for the period while they're in the desert. The second they cross over the river Jordan in the Book of Joshua it says the

manna ceased. So what the crowds are doing here is saying to Jesus we want you not only to do what Moses did, we want you to one up Moses, we want you to do one better than Moses, we want you to give us manna always, not just for 40 years but forever. That is the springboard for Jesus beginning the famous bread of life discourse. In John 6:35, most scholars identify this as the formal beginning of the bread of life discourse, once they asked Jesus to give them the manna forever, Jesus responds by saying, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he believes in me shall never thirst." So what Jesus is doing here, and this is very important, he's not just revealing himself as the bread of life, that's the language he uses but in context bread of life refers to the manna, it refers to the new manna from heaven. So he's taking the manna that they brought up and using it as an image to reveal to them his identity as the Messiah who has come down from heaven. In other words, that he's not an earthly Messiah, he's not just the Davidic king, he's a divine Messiah who has a heavenly origin. And he is himself the true bread from heaven that's going to give life to the world, that's going to usher in the age of salvation, that's going to fulfill the expectation of the Jews that one day the bread from heaven would come back and that it would be the Messiah who would bring it. In this case he's telling them not only am I going to bring the manna, I am the true manna from heaven, I am the bread of God that gives life to the world, that feeds you and quenches your hunger and thirst in a way that the miraculous loaves I multiplied for you yesterday could never do, because this bread is going to give you eternal life; it's going to feed you. It's not just going to give you natural life that passes away, it's going to give you eternal life that lasts forever and ever and ever. Alright, so that's the end of the gospel for today.

It's not surprising that when you go back to the first reading, the Old Testament text for today is the very one that the Jews were quoting to Jesus, Exodus 16, the famous account of the miraculous manna of Moses in the Old Testament. Now in this case the lectionary does not give us all

of Exodus 16. I would've been just fine with that if they would have, but they selected certain verses from the account of the manna. So I'd encourage you to go back and read the entire chapter, Exodus 16, but in lieu of that we'll focus on the versus that the lectionary gives us, verses 2-4 and then 12-15. This is what it says:

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

Now the lectionary skips down to verse 12, which says:

"I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, `At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

Alright, so what's going on in this first chapter from the Old Testament, this first reading? Context is important here. Exodus 16 comes right after Exodus 15, which is the famous account of the crossing of the Red Sea

and the triumph of the Israelites, and the song of Moses after they crossed through the Red Sea and the Red Sea crashes over Pharaoh's chariots and destroys them and gives the Israelites victory. So the context here is important. In Exodus 15 God saves the Israelites from the hands of Pharaoh and certain death at the hands of his charioteers. In Exodus 16, you're not even two verses into it, and already the Israelites began to complain against God and against his prophet Moses, saying Moses you brought us out into the desert to kill us, and second, they begin to long to go back to Egypt. They're tempted to go back to Egypt because, although they may have had whips on their backs in Egypt, they still had full bellies. Notice what it says, they long for the flesh pots of Egypt and they long for the times when they "ate bread to the full." So basically what they're saying here is we rather have earthly slavery with earthly food, than be free and be hungering and thirsting here in the desert. So they start to complain against God and they complain against Moses saying that Moses' real motive was to bring them out and kill them.

Now if I was God at this point I would probably be very impatient with the people that I just saved beginning to complain and rail against me and against the man who I sent them to save them. But God doesn't do that here, he responds to their complaint by saying I will give them bread from heaven to eat. So he responds to their complaining by providing them with food, miraculous food from heaven, the manna. And he says here, I'm going to give them a days portion, every day, that I may test them to see whether they're going to walk in my law or not. So on the one hand, the manna is a gift, it's going to feed them, it's going to nourish them; on the other hand, as we'll see if you read through the Book of Exodus, it's also going to be a test, it's going to be a test to see whether they trust God to provide for them every day, all the way for 40 years, all the way until they reach the promised land. Because one of the things about miracles is God has to provide them, and therefore you have to trust them that he's really going to show up

and provide and make that provision day in, day out. Just because a miracle happened yesterday doesn't necessarily mean it's going to happen tomorrow. So part of the manna itself is kind of a test of the faith of Israel, of their fidelity to God, of their trust in God.

So in that context, in verse 12 and following where the lectionary goes next, God says look, I've heard the complaints of the people of Israel and I'm going to perform a twofold miracle. In the evening I'm going to give them flesh to eat in the form of the quail and in the morning I'm going to give them bread to eat in the form of the manna. I think this element is also important to highlight. A twofold miracle that consists of bread from heaven and flesh from heaven is striking, it's significant. On the one hand it's just something that needs to be highlighted because we tend to forget about the quail for whatever reason. We tend to forget that that was part of God's miraculous provision as well. But also, if you think here typologically, connecting the Old Testament and the New Testament, and you think of the miracles in the Book of Exodus as prefigurations of what God is going to accomplish through Christ in the sacraments, it's extremely significant that the manna is a twofold miracle. It's bread from heaven and flesh from heaven. So when Christ comes in the Eucharist, we're going to see in John 6, he's going to use the language of flesh and the language of bread to reveal the mystery of what he's going to give as the Messiah. A bread that is not just bread but is also his own flesh. The Eucharist is also a twofold miracle, bread from heaven and flesh from heaven, the flesh of Christ.

A third aspect of Exodus 16 that's really fascinating and fantastic to highlight, I love pointing this out, is when the manna comes. It's not just that it comes in the morning but it says here that in the morning dew lay round-about the camp, and when the dew had gone up, the manna was on the ground. So why does this matter? Well on the one hand it shows the kind of miraculous nature of the manna, it shows that there's something mysterious about the way it comes with the dew in the



morning. And if you've ever been out in the morning, maybe seen like clouds, you know like a fog, and then as the dew lifts everything clears up, there's something kind of mysterious and beautiful about that. But for us as Catholics this is a significant verse because we'll see the language reoccur in the Eucharistic prayer of the priest, at particularly the moment in what's called the Epiclesis, when the priest calls down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine to change them into the body and blood of Christ. He's going to say Lord send down your spirit upon these gifts like the dewfall. Maybe you've noticed that at mass, and maybe you've wondered why's the priest talking about dew in the middle of the mass. Well it's an allusion to the Book of Exodus and to the manna from heaven. Just as the old manna comes with the dew from God, so too the new manna is going to come and the Holy Spirit is like dew. The Holy Spirit's frequently compared to water, right. He's kind of this mysterious water that comes and gives us this miraculous bread from heaven. This is a beautiful connection there from the Old Testament and the liturgy.

The fourth and final aspect of the account of the manna in Exodus 16 in the readings for today is what they call the manna. So the Israelites go out in the morning, they see this manna on the ground, this fine, flake like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. Elsewhere it says that it was like wafers made with honey in Exodus 16. Their initial response is, in Hebrew *man hu*, what is it? What is this bread? Which shows two things. First, it shows that it's not an ordinary, natural substance that they would've been familiar with as they were traveling through the desert. I've mentioned rationalism in a previous video where we looked at the feeding of the 5000, and in the 19th century a theory arose that the feeding of the 5000 wasn't actually a supernatural miracle, it was just a miracle of sharing. The same thing has happened with regard to the miracle of the manna in the Old Testament. Some modern interpreters who are inclined to rationalism and to disbelieving in the miraculous have tried to kind of explain the manna as the secretion of a particular bug that lives on the tamarisk plant in the deserts of Sinai. And it is true

that there are bugs that will make these little secretions that live on these tamarisk plants and that the secretions themselves are kinda sweet and they can be edible, you can eat them. If that's your food of choice go ahead, but the problem with that interpretation of trying to reduce the manna to a purely naturalistic explanation is that in Exodus 16 the people have no clue what this is, they've never seen anything like this before. Remember, Moses himself was a shepherd in the desert for 40 years before he went back to Egypt and began the Exodus. Their response shows that this isn't a natural substance, this is something they've never seen before, it's miraculous bread from heaven.

The other dimension that makes clear that the author of Exodus is intending to describe something supernatural not just natural, is the fact that he goes on to say, this isn't in lectionary but it's important to note it, that the manna would appear every day Monday through Friday, but then it would not appear on the Sabbath and that the people had to go out, and if they gathered on Friday twice as much as they ordinarily would gather it would stay over until Sabbath so that they could rest on Sabbath and eat it on the Sabbath. And then they would resume again Sunday through Friday, the manna would be there but on Friday you would prepare twice as much because on Saturday, the Sabbath, the manna would not be there. So some scholars have kind of jokingly pointed out there that even if you took the naturalistic explanation of manna as a secretion of these bugs that live on the tamarisk plant, you still would need a miracle because the bugs would have to observe the Sabbath every week in not making the manna every Saturday. So that's highly implausible from a purely naturalistic point of view to say the least. So the point here is that the author of Exodus is clearly intending something extraordinary, something miraculous.

So when the people say *man hu*, what is this bread, that's a question that in a sense echoes down through the ages all the way to the time of Christ. Just as they say what is it, what kind of bread is this, is it

ordinary, is it extraordinary, is it natural, is it supernatural, is it earthly, is it heavenly, what is it? Moses answered it is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. The same question echoes down through the centuries to today, and the way you answer that question really determines how you live every day of your life. What is it, what is this bread? Is it ordinary bread, is it extraordinary? Is it ordinary food or is it the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ? How you see the Eucharist, how you answer that question, *man hu*, what is it, is one of the fundamental questions of the Christian life that we have to answer. It impacts every aspect of our lives of faith and our life of discipleship. It's a very powerful text chosen for the lectionary for today for the first reading in the Old Testament. It is very prophetic and very significant.

And of course when we turn to the Responsorial Psalm you'll see that the theme picks right up there on the image of the manna in Psalm 78. So the whole, everything about today's Sunday readings is focused on the manna as the context. So Psalm 78, particularly verse 24-25, we see in this Psalm what the psalmist is doing is basically recounting the history of God's wondrous works on behalf of his people. It's like a poetic history of salvation, and when he gets to the exodus one of things he highlights is the fact that God fed His people in the desert with miraculous manna from heaven. And this is how Psalm 78 describes it, verse 23 says:

Yet he commanded the skies above,  
and opened the doors of heaven;  
and he rained down upon them manna to eat,  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.

So notice here that the context is the exodus and God's glorious provision of the manna. You can see the psalmist himself clearly

understands this as miraculous food, as supernatural food because he says he opened the skies to give it to them, he opened the doors of heaven, and that men ate the bread of Angels, right. Not men ate the secretion of bugs, it's men ate the bread of Angels, and this is so he sees it as one of the signs and wonders of the exodus that shows God's magnificence and God's glory. Which by the way, in Latin *Panis Angelicus*, which is one of the great classic Eucharistic hymns in our faith and in our tradition, is the Latin for 'the bread of Angels,' *Panis Angelicus*. That's what the Eucharist really is and that's what the Psalm is doing. On the one level it's recounting what God did in the Old Testament, on the other hand when we sing the song in the context of the mass we're celebrating the fact that he still gives us the bread of Angels and that we are about to receive the bread of Angels in communion, in holy Communion, in the holy Eucharist.

So in closing then I just want to highlight a couple of brief points about this. I think for me as a Catholic I'd always heard about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but I can't recall as a young person growing up and learning about the church's sacrament anyone ever connecting it to the manna in the Old Testament as a way of explaining it. I think this is a very powerful way of explaining it. I think it's very helpful because it shows that the Eucharist isn't merely a symbol, isn't just a symbol, but that it's miraculous, that it is not even just a sacrament but it's a supernatural sign of God's miraculous provision of the son of God's body, blood, soul, and divinity. In other words, why do we Catholics believe that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Christ? Well because it's a miracle that is involved here. In other words, if the manna from heaven in the Old Testament is miraculous than how much more will the new manna of the New Testament also be miraculous.

In closing I'd like to add one last point from the Catechism here. If you're like me and the connection between the manna and the Eucharist was not well known to you then I would encourage you to look at

paragraph 1094 in the Catechism. The section on the Eucharist in the Catechism is wonderful, it's very rich. In that section, paragraph 1094, the Catechism is talking about typology and how if we want to understand the new covenant of the church we really need to go back and look at the old covenant in the Old Testament. In particular we need to draw connections between the old and the new in a way known as typology, in an approach to scripture known as typology. This is what the Catechism says in paragraph 1094:

This catechesis...

Meaning the catechesis of the apostles and the ancient Christians.

...unveils what lay hidden under the letter of the Old Testament: the mystery of Christ. It is called "typological" because it reveals the newness of Christ on the basis of the "figures" (types) which announce him in the deeds, words, and symbols of the first covenant... Thus the flood and Noah's ark prefigured salvation by Baptism, as did the cloud and the crossing of the Red Sea. Water from the rock was the figure of the spiritual gifts of Christ, and *manna in the desert prefigured the Eucharist, "the true bread from heaven."*<sup>2</sup>

Quoting there John 6:32 which we read for today. So we see very clearly there that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is explicit that the manna of the Old Testament is a prefiguration of the Eucharist and we're going to continue to study that as we walk through the rest of John 6 in the weeks to come.

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<sup>2</sup> CCC 1094