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Commentary on the Gospel: The Bread of God

Gospel for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 6:24-35)

When the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, 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.”

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Commentary

The Gospel this Sunday presents part of the so-called discourse on the bread of life preached by Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum. The recent miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is used by the Master

as the occasion for setting forth deep truths about the mystery of the Eucharist and the need for faith. Today we are going to pause briefly to consider this second point.

It is striking how little capacity his listeners show for understanding what he is announcing about the Eucharist. They remain stuck on the material plane, seeking only to receive more food from him. They view the power of the Master from Galilee as an attractive and easy solution to their ordinary material needs. And they ask him for more clear signs if he wants them to believe in him.

But Jesus encourages them to more supernatural, to “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” (v. 27).

The little capacity these people show for understanding Jesus' words is something we may suffer from as well, almost without realizing it. This can happen when we center our petitions to God on material goods, like physical health, work, passing an exam, etc. And perhaps we forget to give priority to asking often for spiritual goods: someone's conversion, state of grace, return to the sacraments and friendship with God, the generosity needed to dedicate oneself completely to Him, etc.

This "hierarchy" in our petitions to God, giving priority to supernatural, spiritual goods, without leaving out other pressing material needs, transforms our way thinking and acting: "do not labor for the food which perishes, but for that which endures to eternal life," Jesus tells us. If we act in this way, our life of faith will grow continuously.

As Saint Josemaría once wrote: “You hear people saying sometimes that there are fewer miracles nowadays. Might it not rather be that there are fewer people living a life of faith? ... We must have complete faith in the one who saves us, in this divine Doctor who was sent with the express purpose of curing us, and the more serious or hopeless our illness is the stronger our faith has to be. We must learn to acquire the divine measure of things, never losing our supernatural outlook, and realizing that Jesus makes use also of our weaknesses to reveal his glory.”[1]

Jesus tells those listening to him: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (v. 29). God wants to work miracles in us; above all, the miracle of our divinization. To do so he needs our faith and our trust, shown by valuing spiritual goods over material ones,

the health and well-being of our soul
over that of our body.

[1] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*,
nos. 190-194.

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