

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

6: Give us this day our daily bread (ii)

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Last session we thought about bread and food mainly in terms of our physical needs. We thought about issues of justice and generosity and some of the ethical issues that surround food and local and global needs. This week we are thinking about the request for “daily bread” being also, perhaps, about a desire for spiritual sustenance and strengthening. To help us with this we are going to reflect on passages from the Gospel of John, chapter 6.

An ice-breaker for the group:

- What is the biggest (in terms of the number of people attending) meal you have shared in? What was it? What was it for? What was it like?

We are now going to reflect on passages from John 6. These passages begin with John's account of the feeding of the 5000 but then reflect on the nature of who Jesus is. Also, in the background of the passage we have a reflection on the nature and importance of the Eucharist. First, we are going to begin with St John's version of the feeding of the 5000. This may be a very familiar passage to us but try to look at it with fresh eyes and to think about what is going on here and why? The questions after the passage may help to guide your thoughts and discussion.

John 6.1-15

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon

Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

- What are your overall impressions and thoughts about this passage? What strikes you? What excites you? What puzzles you?
- Why do you think this "sign" or "miracle" takes place? What do you think Jesus is doing here?
- What do you think about the parts that Philip and Andrew play in this amazing incident?
- What strikes you about the quantity and nature of the left-overs?
- What do you think about the reaction of the crowd? Why was Jesus so keen to withdraw to a place by himself?

Having explored the feeding miracle John chapter 6 now reflects on the nature and vital importance, to us, of Jesus himself. The Gospel of John can feel quite daunting, revealing ideas that are rich and deep but often confusing.

As we reflect on this passage it is good to remember that a staple food may be the only food some people eat – no variety, but it still sustains and nourishes them and allows them to have life. It is vital for life. What might it mean to think of Jesus as being like a staple food for us?

In the passage the "manna in the wilderness" refers to the time the people had left the slavery of Egypt, crossed the red sea and found themselves without food in the desert. God miraculously provided the grumbling people with wafer like bread that sustained and nourished them.

The questions at the end of the passage may help to guide your thinking and discussion.

John 6.25-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.’ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform 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, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- Why are the people searching for Jesus and excited to find him?
- What do you think is the “food that endures for eternal life?”
- Why do the people crave a “sign” – after all they have just been thrilled and excited by the feeding of the 5000?
- What is the “true bread from heaven?” When Jesus declares that he is the bread of life, what do you think he means that those who come to him and believe in him will never be hungry or thirsty?
- Do we think of Jesus as being as vital to us as the food we eat?

In the final passage of this session, we are going to look at how the words spoken by Jesus in John 6 pre-empt the Eucharist and invite us to reflect on the Eucharist. As we think about a prayer that asks for “daily bread” we cannot help but be mindful of bread being at the heart of the Eucharist, and the Eucharist being so important to our Christian journey.

Ideas and concepts of “body/flesh” and “blood” have caused the Church no end of trouble over the centuries. And when we think of body and blood we naturally think of physical things like muscles, sinews and platelets! But I don’t think this is how Jesus thought. At the last supper when he said, “This is my body/blood” he didn’t tear off his flesh or cut a vein. He wasn’t speaking literally but metaphorically – these are metaphors! And what would the disciples have understood by Jesus’s words? In Jewish thinking the idea of “body” was a way of saying “the whole of me,” or “my essence”. When Jesus says, “This is my body,” he means this is who I am – my personality, my humanity, my divinity, my dreams, memories and hopes. And the blood was, understandably, thought to be the life force of a person, their energy and vitality. When Jesus says, “This is my blood,” he is saying this is my life, its meaning and drive, given for you. Bread and Wine are metaphors, but metaphors are powerful, and when filled with prayer, faith, meaning and divine intention are a way of enabling us to receive the fullness of Jesus into our lives.

Some of this may seem bewildering to you but hopefully gives some meaning and context as we look at this final passage.

John 6.53 – 59

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.’ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

- What are your reactions and reflections on this passage as a whole?
- What do you think is happening at the Eucharist? What do you think about when you receive the bread and wine?
- How important is it for you to receive bread and wine?

Closing Prayers