

18th Sunday In Ordinary Time Year A (August 2nd, 2020)

When you say your Morning Offering, please remember the Holy Father's special intentions for this month.

Isaiah 55:1-3

This reading is taken from a part of the book called Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah that was probably written by an unknown author in the name of Isaiah. Today's selection is part of a call for conversion, a call to take advantage of the saving gifts so generously offered. Originally, it was a call to those exiled in Babylon to return to Jerusalem, but it is also a call that is made at all times, to everyone.¹³ Today's selection is an invitation to the Covenant banquet.¹²

Thus says the Lord: This is God speaking and he invites ALL to his sumptuous banquet, which is more a feast for the soul than for the stomach. It is clearly associated with a future time, the "end times," when God's reign will be fully visible.⁵

1All you who are thirsty, All are invited to this banquet; the only condition is a "thirst" for God.¹ **come** Four times they are told to "come" in this selection. This means that Israel must do her part and "come", thereby exercising her faith.² **to the water!** Water is the symbol for grace and the divine life.¹³ The Christian reader is reminded of baptism, the water of Christ that confers the gift of eternal life.¹ **You who have no money, come,** The poor, the "Anawim" are specifically invited.¹ **receive grain and eat; come, without paying and without cost,** God's salvation cannot be bought. It is a wondrous gift from God, exceeding the worth of gold!² Jesus also spoke about God's gifts being freely given when he told his apostles, "Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the leprous, expel demons. You have received without pay, give without pay."⁴ **drink wine and milk!**

2Why spend your money for what is not bread; In the Eucharist, the banquet of the New Testament, the words of the prophet come true in the complete sense in the words spoken by our Lord when he instituted that sacrament: "Take and eat" (cf. verse 1) the true bread of life, the very finest food, which money cannot buy (vv 1-3). The invitation extended by the prophet is a call to Christians to partake of the Blessed Eucharist which is the pinnacle, here on earth, of the Covenant of love between God and his people: the sign and source of Christian joy, the preparation for the eternal banquet in heaven.¹² We can starve spiritually without his food, as surely as we can starve physically without our daily bread. As our bodies hunger and thirst, so do our souls.³ **your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.** DeGraaf, Wann and Naylor have written a book called "Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic" that defines Affluenza as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more." What a contrast to this passage that invites us to the Banquet of the Lord that truly SATISFIES.

3Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. The way to "come" to the Lord is by listening to God's Word which is the source of life.¹ **I will renew with you the everlasting covenant,** This does not mean a covenant beginning now and lasting forever, but one bringing the promises of the distant past to present fulfillment.¹ **the benefits assured to David.** The promises that were made to David 500 years before are still in effect! They are now being granted to all the people who have obedient faith in God's word!²

Romans 8:35, 37-39

Brothers and sisters:

³⁵What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? Paul denies suffering the power to cut us off from Christ for in his mind, only sin can pry us away from his grace.⁶ Isaiah 59:2 says: “It is your crimes that separate you from your God. It is your sins that make him hide his face so that he will not hear you.” This selection from Paul was written to the church in Rome that soon would undergo terrible persecution. In just a few short years, Paul’s words would turn into painful realities and the people would need the reassurance that trials and tribulations did not mean that they had been abandoned and the reminder that nothing can separate us from God’s love!³ St. Cyprian wrote: “None of these can separate believers; nothing can snatch away those clinging to Christ’s body and blood (the Eucharist). This persecution is for the examination and evaluation of our heart. God wanted us to be tried and proved, as He has always tried His own, and yet, in His trials, never at any time has His help failed believers.”¹⁵

³⁷No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. The point is that it says in Philippians 4:13: “Alone I can do nothing, but I can do all things in Him who strengthens me!” There is also another matter to consider when we are confronted with difficulties whether large or small and that is the importance of offering up sacrifices. In the words of the Angel at Fatima, “The message calls on us to make of everything you can a sacrifice and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners.” Sr. Lucia, the last living seer from the apparitions explained that “They may be sacrifices of spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical or material things; depending on the particular moment.” Such sacrifices will at times be the crosses of our daily work, at other times it will be the difficulties of life which we can accept with serenity, patience and resignation. At yet other times, it will be the humiliations that come with our faults and imperfections.⁷

³⁸For I am convinced that Here Paul begins a rundown of different forces and dimensions of creation: human existence-- neither death, nor life, spirits-- nor angels, nor principalities, time-- nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, powers may refer to civil authorities but some would classify them along with angels and principalities as hierarchies of angels, either good or evil; and then there are astronomical forces⁶

³⁹nor height, nor depth, height and depth may refer to cosmic forces which, in the culture of that time, were thought to have some influence over the lives of men.¹⁴

nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. By listing these powerful superior forces (real or imaginary) St. Paul is making the point that nothing and nobody, no created thing, is stronger than God’s love for us.¹⁴ This is not a claim that salvation is absolutely assured for believers, but rather, a claim that salvation cannot be threatened by any cosmic force outside of us. The only real threat to salvation is our own will, which is free to reject God’s love and forfeit eternal life through sin.⁶

Matthew 14:13-21

The story of Jesus feeding the 5000 is one of the most familiar stories in the gospels because some form of it occurs six times and in every Gospel.⁹ The event anticipates the Eucharist, a point that Matthew reinforces by using the same series of verbs (taking...blessed...broke...gave) both here and at the Last Supper. The miracle also recalls the similar OT episode in 2 Kings where the prophet Elisha multiplied 20 barley loaves to feed 100 men, with some left over. There is also an analogy, which comes to us from St. John of Alexandria when he comments the five loaves signify alms given to the poor. As here, the size of the donation is less significant than the generosity of one’s heart. Gifts given to the poor are, in return, multiplied by God back to the giver as treasure in heaven.⁸

¹³When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, John announced the kingdom and called the people to repent and be baptized, (Mt. 3:1-2) including Herod whom he chastised saying that it was not right for him to live with Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. From that time on Herod wanted to kill John but was afraid of the people who regarded him as a prophet. Then on Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the court, which delighted Herod so much that he swore he would grant her anything she asked for. Prompted by her mother she said, "Bring me the head of John the Baptizer on a platter." (Mt. 14:3-8) This frivolous celebration of a petty monarch's birthday, staged by himself, a banquet at which *life is taken* is contrasted with our reading of the come-one-come-all gathering of the needy at which *life is given*. The first took place in Herod's hall, an epicenter of courtly power and corruption while Jesus' banquet was held on the grass of a deserted place that left behind all notions of worldly success and striving.¹¹ **he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns.** At its widest the lake was only 8 miles wide. Jesus' friends were fisherfolk and it was not difficult to embark on one of their boats and to seek retirement on the east side of the lake. That is what Jesus did when he heard of the death of John.¹⁶

¹⁴When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. Here we see Jesus moving into solitude for prayer and on his return to human association, he perceives the needs of the people. In other words, *prayer produces mission*. When we contemplate the Father, we come to see others as God sees them.¹¹

¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place. Being a deserted place brings with it the allusion to ancient Israel's wandering in the wilderness and God's feeding Israel with the manna.¹⁰ and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."

¹⁶Jesus said to them, "There is no need for them to go away; Jesus does not want the people to leave unsatisfied from his presence.¹¹ give them some food yourselves."

¹⁷But they said to him, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have here." Because the fish don't fit the Eucharistic overtones, they aren't mentioned again.¹⁵

¹⁸Then he said, "Bring them here to me," With what they brought to him, Jesus worked his miracle. Jesus sets every one of us the tremendous task of communicating himself to men; but he does not demand from us splendors, and qualities and magnificences that we do not possess. He says to us, "Come to me as you are, however ill-equipped; bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service." Little is always much in the hands of Christ.¹⁶

¹⁹and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. The ritual is one of the daily Jewish meal but the formula points to the Last Supper.¹⁵ We see echoes of the Eucharist in this story because the language of taking, blessing, breaking and giving the bread is clearly ritual language. Note that this meal, like the Eucharist itself, is an anticipation of the heavenly banquet in the kingdom.⁹ Jesus feeds the crowd through the hands of the apostles. The disciples' intermediary role points forward to their priesthood. They distribute the bread provided by Jesus in anticipation of the eucharistic liturgy, where the priests of the New Covenant give the Bread of Life as Holy Communion to the Church.⁸ I like to think of the woman who baked those 5 loaves with no idea of how God would use them!

²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full. Each apostle seems to have brought with him a traveling-basket of the kind regarded as part of the normal equipment of a Jew.¹¹ Twelve baskets suggests the 12 tribes of Israel.⁹

²¹Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children. This could bring the total to 20,000 or more.⁹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (2) "The Book Of Isaiah Chapters 40-66" by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (3) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (4) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (5) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (6) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (7) "Calls From The Message Of Fatima" by Sister Lucia, (8) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (10) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (11) "Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word" by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (12) "The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets," (13) "Catholic Source Book" Edited by Rev. Peter Klein, (14) "The Navarre Bible: Romans & Galatians", (15) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (16) "The Gospel of Matthew" by William Barclay.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.