

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

This reading takes us back in time to the period of the Exodus after the Israelites had left Egypt and before they arrived at Mount Sinai. The events recounted here take place in the Wilderness of Sin, an area just to the northwest of Mount Sinai. During their journey, God put the Israelites to three tests to see if they would obey Him: today we will study the Manna & Quail, an event that occurred two and one-half months after leaving Egypt.³

²The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Verse 8 makes it clear that their grumbling is not really against Moses and Aaron, but against the Lord.⁶ These complaints bring into focus the people's lack of faith and hope, and (by contrast) the faithfulness of God, who time and again alleviates their needs even though they do not deserve it.⁴

³The Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! In Egypt, although slaves, they had plenty to eat. Pharaoh had provided for them in abundance and now they are starving.⁵ This is their gratitude for the freedom that God has just purchased for them.⁷ But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!" The description of the Wilderness of Sin was that it was a place of barrenness, rocks, sand and stone. The temperature was brutally hot, and it was windy during the day, and dry and frigid during the night. It was a perfect place for God to test and shape the character of his people. We have all experienced circumstances that cause stress, and the natural response is to complain. The Israelites were not focusing on the cause of their stress, and that was their lack of trust in God. When pressure comes your way, resist the temptation to make a quick escape like running away or going back. Instead, concentrate in prayer on God's power and wisdom to help you deal with the cause of your stress.²

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Once again God decides to demonstrate the constancy of divine love.⁷ Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.

¹²"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the Lord, am your God." "Manna in the desert" has become one of the greatest of all religious symbols for God as beneficent provider. It has also become a most encouraging reminder when we forget that our God never forgets us.¹

¹³In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, The quail don't figure prominently in this story but Numbers 11 tells us the quail was provided because the people were dissatisfied with the manna. The commentaries, in an effort to explain the miracle, tell us that quail fly south annually from their northern European and Scandinavian quarters in September and October to winter in Africa. In May and June they make the return trip. The migration usually follows the wind, but if the wind suddenly shifts, the entire flock may be forced to land where, because they are exhausted, they are easy to catch. This explanation doesn't tell us how they appeared daily for 40 years instead of just during the migration—a miracle has occurred.³

¹⁴and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. Again, the commentaries, in an effort to explain away the miracles, tell us that the manna is the honey-like droppings from the tamarisk tree. These droppings are secretions from two kinds of scale lice, which suck large quantities of liquid from the twigs in the spring to collect

nitrogen for their grubs. It contains glucose and fructose but no protein. When it drops to the ground it becomes somewhat firm in the cold night air. It has a low melting point (70 degrees) and thus must be gathered early before the sun causes it to melt. Today, Bedouins consider it a delicacy because of its sweet taste. Again, this does not explain the miracle as it occurred daily (except on the Sabbath, as a double portion was provided on Friday) for 40 years; not just in the spring. Also, this sustained about 1 million Israelites for 40 years. Another miracle has occurred.³

15On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, “What is this?” for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, “This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.” The Catechism teaches that “manna in the desert prefigured the Eucharist, the true bread from heaven.”⁵ (CCC 1094)

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Brothers and sisters: This week St. Paul speaks about interior renewal. Every Christian needs to lead a new life in Christ in order to contribute to the growth of the body. This means one must shed the life of vanity and sin which one led before one’s conversion and put on Christ the new man.³ The Catechism tells us that Christians contribute to building up the Church by the constancy of their convictions and their moral lives. The Church increases, grows, and develops through the holiness of her faithful, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.⁵ (CCC 2045)

17I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; This is the common Jewish view of pagans, they were empty-headed. The emptiness of their minds had led them away from God, the source of all truth. If the mind operates in a vacuum, the resulting knowledge produces nothing but illusion and deceit. Origin calls us to “consider what Paul calls ‘futility of mind’. He says that this occurs when someone has a mind but does not use it for contemplation, instead surrendering it to captivity under Satan.”³ Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are new creations through grace, so their lives should reflect that newness and be radically different from the sinful lives of unbelievers.⁸

20that is not how you learned Christ,

21assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, The Christian life is a process that continually leads a person into a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We keep changing all the time as we continue to listen to God.²

22that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, The type of life they led when equipped only with the resources belonging to human nature as sons of Adam. Human weakness prompted countless moral failures that caused spiritual death. Paul refers to this in Colossians 3:9, Romans 8:13 and Galatians 6:8.³

23and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, Paul knows that becoming a Christian doesn’t end on the day one is baptized. So he writes to the Ephesians with reminders that their commitment to Christ entails a whole new way of life and becoming in fact a new person.⁷ The most dramatic change takes place inwardly. The consequence of baptism is that we must acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking. It is a daunting challenge, but there’s no denying its validity—nor the joy that comes with having accepted it.¹

24and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth. In verses 22-24 we are told to “put away the old self” and to “put on the new self.” These words belong to a baptismal liturgy. The candidate removed his old clothes, went into the baptismal water, then put on new white clothing upon emerging; outward signs of an inner change: he had put aside his former

life, washed away his sin, and put on Christ, beginning a new manner of life. St. John Chrysostom wrote that the new clothing now being put on is the new way of life and conduct that flows from baptism. There one is no longer clothed by deceitful desires but by God's own righteousness.³ The way we live is really what we believe, and to be called a Christian, one should live like Christ. People should be able to see the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian, simply because of the way a Christian lives.²

John 6: 24-35

In time we are one year prior to Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection.³

24 When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. Capernaum is a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is the place known to be Jesus' center of activity in Galilee. Matthew notes that Jesus established a residence there. Since Jesus had fled to the mountain alone (last week, last verse) and the crowd knew that he had not departed with the Apostles (John 6:16), they looked for him where they knew he maintained a home base.³

25 And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" In the New Testament, the term "Rabbi" means "master" and was the way a student of the scribes would address his teacher. The use of this address to Jesus is significant because, even though they don't know precisely who he is, or what his mission is, they do recognize him as a religious leader.³

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, The doubled Amen is a solemn affirmation, an oath.³ I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. They have not understood the true meaning of the signs but instead are now looking for a handout—free food (things of the body).³

27 Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, Material food keeps us alive in this world, spiritual food sustains and develops supernatural life which will last forever. This spiritual food, only God can give us. Through God's infinite love we are given, in the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus himself as nourishment for our souls.³ which the Son of Man will give you. This is Jesus' favorite designation of himself. The image draws on Daniel and Genesis and Ezekiel. It is a title never applied to him by the evangelists but it is a certain indication to his hearers that he claims to have been sent by God.³ For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." When a seal is impressed on wax, the wax receives the complete form of the seal. So it is that the Son received the entire form of the Father.³

28 So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." They can't do God's work; their task is to believe in him, and consequently in what he says, in faith (not because of the miracles he does but because of who sent him). He who comes from God speaks the words of God.³

30 So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Their enthusiasm over the feeding of the five thousand is already beginning to wane. That was a short-lived sign. They are hungry again. They want more free food for the stomach, they have not discerned that he is promising spiritual food.³

31 Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat." The people are asking Jesus to prove that he is worthy of the belief that he requests in verse 29.

They offer the example from history of Moses who earned credibility by providing manna to their ancestors.¹

³²So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; With the double amen Jesus reminds them that it was God, not Moses, who provided the manna.³ my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. By using the term “my Father” Jesus calls himself the Son of God. Note the transition from past tense to present tense.³

³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread Although they now have a perception that he is speaking of non-material bread, and that he can give this bread, they do not yet understand that this bread is himself.³ always.” They are requesting a continual (lifetime) supply of bodily food. This causes Jesus’ response in the next verse.³

³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread Jesus specifically identifies himself with the bread of which he is speaking.³ of life; Like the “water of life” (John 4:10) it satisfies forever. Shifts emphasis from ‘bread of God’ to ‘bread of life’; the gift of God is everlasting life. The bread of God gives life to the world (verse 33).³ whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” Here Jesus equates coming to him to believing in him. It is through faith that we approach our Lord. Jesus also uses the analogy of food and drink to show that he is the one who really meets all of man’s noblest aspirations and meets all of man’s needs.³ Jesus is insisting that he himself is spiritual nourishment—not only by his body but in his teaching and in his life. This is what the sacrament offers us—not just food and drink but true spiritual nourishment.⁸ We need to remember always that Christ alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and soul.²

Some of the information for this commentary was taken from: (1) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser, (2) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (3) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn, (4) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch, (5) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church”, (6) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2009” by Mary A. Eble, (7) “workbook FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS: 1991” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, and (8) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick.

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