

Sunday 5th August 2018

10th Sunday after Trinity Year B (Proper 13)

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Psalm 78:23-29

2 Peter 1:1-15

John 6:24-35

9:30am The Church of the Ascension, Brookfield

11am St. Mary Magdalene's, Ribbleton

Have you ever been on a long walk, got lost, with a grumbling stomach and then ended up thinking you would never find your way home? Or have you ever been lost miles from home? I remember, as a child, getting lost on Lowther Park in Lytham, separated from my grandparents and worrying if I'd ever find my way back to them. Thankfully a kind lady saw me looking lost and helped me find my way back to my grandparents. That hour or two was so terrifying for me, but imagine being lost for 40 years? Well that is the fate that met the grumbling people of Israel – led out in to the wilderness and ending up lost for 40 years. In today's Old Testament reading, we hear of how they began to grumble. They had forgotten what they had left behind in Egypt. They had

forgotten that they had left slavery behind them. Many of them craved to go back to Egypt to slavery because at least they were fed there, unlike in the wilderness where food was scarce. They had forgotten God's promise that he would never abandon them.

The people started to complain to Moses and Aaron, which in turn meant that they were grumbling against God. God responded by providing quails to eat in the evening and manna (or bread) in the morning. This continued for the remainder of their 40 years in the desert.

However, in today's Gospel reading, we hear of a different kind of manna or bread from heaven. Here, Jesus starts to outline the theology that would become the basis of Christian living for the next 2000 years. The idea that Jesus is the bread of life, and that we now receive him in the Eucharist.

What is so significant about this meal that we share around the altar today compared with the manna that the

people of Israel received and with the food that we eat at our own tables?

Well, Jesus explains that in today's Gospel. Jesus, when questioned by the crowd, explains that the yes the people of Israel were given bread in the wilderness but the true bread of heaven was being given by His Father. Jesus told the crowd that the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

The crowd, not truly understanding Jesus, asked Jesus to give them this bread always. Jesus understanding their ignorance and weakness, as he does with us too, explains that He is the bread of life. Now, I know that I have said this before, but the phrase "I am" appears in John seven times:

"I am the bread of life..."

"I am the light of the world..."

"I am the gate..."

"I am the good shepherd..." (after which the Good Shepherd chapel in this church is named)

"I am the resurrection and the life..."

"I am the way, the truth and the life..."

“I am the true vine...”

To us today we may wonder why Jesus should focus so much on the phrase “I am”. Of course, he could just have been using the phrase “I am” as we do in modern day discourse i.e. saying that he is each of those things that is necessary for our salvation. But there is much more to it than that. The phrase “I am” or “Ego eimi” in Greek links explicitly to Exodus 3 when Moses speaks to God in the burning bush and asks who he is to which God replies “I am that I am” or in Hebrew “Ehyeh-Asher-Ayher”.

Jesus is saying not only am I the bread sent from heaven, but I am God made man. Later, at His Last Supper, Jesus instructs the disciples to take the loaf of bread and eat it because it is His body.

Jesus took the manna of the wilderness and replaced it with something so much more significant – His own precious Body and Blood which the Church still receives today. From the early days of the Church, the Eucharist was celebrated. The Church Fathers as early back as the 2nd century

proclaimed Jesus present in bread and wine. Indeed, the idea that the Eucharist is only a symbolic act only really came about 500 years ago.

But I don't wish to dwell on the history of the understanding of what happens in the Eucharist. Rather, I want to dwell on its significance. Earlier I asked if you have ever been lost. Well now, I wonder, have you ever been hungry. *(To young people)* Have you ever complained to your parents that you're so hungry that you could eat a horse? Or on a long journey have you ever said "are we nearly there yet? I'm starving!" *(To adults)* So hungry that your stomach burned with pain? Well earthly bread can quench that hunger. But now think of your spiritual life. Do you feel satisfied in your spiritual life? Do you feel spiritually hungry or are you satisfied?

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, recently said:

"The Eucharist is a simple food, like bread, yet it is the only food that satisfies for there is no greater love. There we encounter Jesus; we share His life and we feel His love. My dear brothers and sisters, let us choose this food of life! Let us make Mass our priority! Let us rediscover Eucharistic adoration in our

communities! Let us implore the grace to hunger for God with an insatiable desire to receive what He has prepared for us.”

In this, Francis is saying regain your love of the Eucharist for in it alone does God satisfy spiritual hunger. This parish used to, in times gone by when it was blessed with more than one parish priest, have 9 Eucharists, one each day of the week except Thursday and Sunday when it had two Eucharists. Have we forgotten what it means to be a sacramental people? Do we place more importance on other things in our own lives? I say this because the only reason we have lost so many midweek Masses originally is that attendance was so low. We do still have 3 midweek Eucharists and two Sunday Eucharists but may be getting to Mass is difficult, in which case there is a card available at the back of church for each of you to take away – a simple act of spiritual communion that you can undertake when you cannot get to Mass.

It has become more and more common to dismiss the Eucharist as irrelevant to young people. Popular culture has seemingly dismissed the Eucharist in favour of more modern

and trendy forms of worship, or so I thought. That was until this week. Thousands of young pilgrims arrived this week at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Each day they attended Mass presided at by one of the Society Bishops, normally bishop Philip, our own bishop. On the last day of the pilgrimage, Bishop Philip spoke at the Eucharist and said: *“If Jesus got out of the tomb for you, you can get out of your bed for him. Generation Hope goes to Mass every Sunday.”*

At the heart of what we do must always be the Eucharist. Remember. We are a Eucharistic people and at the centre of our spiritual life must be the worship of the God who manifests himself in form of bread and wine so that we may enjoy incarnational relationship with him. At the heart of our daily worship should be receiving our Lord Jesus Christ in bread and wine. Amen.