

Sunday 18-B5 Homily by Fr. Gabor

Please read first: John 16: 2-4.12-15.

When I was younger and I didn't like the look of what my Mother put on the table, I waited until she went into the kitchen and whispered to my brother: 'What is that?' If we were an Aberdonian family living in the North East, I would probably have said to my brother 'Fit's at?', and if I were a Jewish boy wondering in the desert behind Moses with all the other people seeing that strange powdery, delicate thing on the ground that God gave them for the journey I would have used the ancient Hebrew expression: 'Mannah?', 'What is that?'

Yes, the word 'Mannah' in Hebrew means 'What is that?' So the food that the Lord gave the Jewish people for strength was called 'What is that?' food. I am sure the Lord didn't feel offended by the reaction of His people, and my Mother wasn't offended either when she looked at my face. It is strange to call any food as 'What is that?', but I think the reason for it was that it was something that the people of Israel had never seen before. After all it just suddenly appeared from the sky. They were desperately hungry so they didn't bother about what was that, but just ate it.

That 'hunger' inside the people was the key issue in the Gospel reading to which the Lord responded when he fed them with loaves and fishes, but that was only to satisfy their immediate need; their physical hunger. However in today's reading He points towards a deeper hunger; to spiritual hunger, and wants people to recognise and notice this deeper hunger in them, which he cannot satisfy with mere food. This is why He says: 'Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life.' He later on clarifies that this food is He himself: 'I am the bread of life'. Today it is comfort eating that points towards this deeper hunger, but since many people do not turn to the food that endures for eternal life, namely to Jesus, they continue to use means of comfort that merely alleviates this inner hunger, but never satisfies it.

Even we Catholics, who are offered the Bread of Life do not necessarily feel satisfied by it. It is not because there is something wrong with the Eucharist, but because we do not always come to Church in a spiritually and existentially hunger. This spiritually and existentially hunger is so important for appreciating the Bread of Life whom we receive at every Mass. What do I mean by this? The answer is in today's readings. These readings tell us that to appreciate the Bread of Life we need to hunger for it, not just merely go to Mass as a weekly religious practice, but more than that: we need to arrive in a spiritually hungry state; always looking for something more than what anybody can give us, because the food that we receive at Mass is a spiritual food that only satisfies spiritual hunger, but without that spiritual hunger there is no spiritual satisfaction.

What is spiritual hunger and how does anybody get spiritually hungry?

Spiritual hunger is when you hunger for a deep communion with God and fellow human beings, which satisfies you more than earthly pleasures. To get to this state first we need to increase our trust in God's promise of a more satisfying life, and secondly we need leave behind what we use temporarily to numb our inner hunger; just like the Jewish people had to leave behind the pots of meat in Egypt, the enslavement in Egypt, which symbolises our attachment to things and people, and get out into the desert, to the place where hunger and thirst is the single most powerful experience. When you leave behind old superficial customs, such as watching rubbish on the TV, or sinful customs and turn to God more intently you will inevitably experience a lack of satisfaction, which has been always been there, and that is when you come to that state of inner hunger.

But see what the Jewish people did. They, through Moses, called out to God, who responded and gave them something they had never seen before, a so called 'What is that?' food, Mannah in the desert, which they really appreciated, though it wasn't a gourmet type food. But it helped them, satisfied their hunger until they eventually, after 40 years, arrived in the Promised Land. Can you imagine eating a powdery delicate food for 40 years! The Lord made a point in Moses time', then in Jesus time and He does the same in our time: work for food that endures to eternal life', and that food will give you the stamina to cope with what life throws at you and the strength to remain faithful to the journey and direction which the heavenly Father has set for you, and if you do so you will arrive to the Promised Land, to Heaven. Notice that the word chuch liturgy also means to render 'work' for the Lord, through which we receive the food that endure for eternal life.

So do not be a spiritual macho and think that you don't need anything more spiritually, because that means you are using supplements to cope with life's journey or you are not on a journey towards the real Promised Land, but still sitting in Egypt beside the pans of meat, in other words you are using supplements that do not come from the Lord, and so you may never discover the real strength that comes from the Eucharist. St. Augustine says: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." So let's continue our journey towards God the Father and let's hunger together for the food that endures to eternal life.