

18th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Aug. 2-3, 2014

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-3, Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

I have long been told that nothing in life is free. There is no such thing as a free lunch, we are told we must be ready to pay the price, and that we shouldn't count the cost. All of these are familiar phrases and figures of speech. Yet, we are told in our first reading, those of us with no money are to come and receive grain and eat, come without paying and without cost. In order to be effective in our daily lives, this idyllic scene from the Old Testament has to be taken at its word.

This passage was composed first during the Babylonian Exile, a time of distress and discouragement, when people were far away from their homeland. So, these were not pie in the sky words. They were intended as practical and real. While the prophet invites the people to “come and listen” to God, he is not advising them to stop all other activities.

He assumes that we are in the midst of our daily activities, but that we should not spend money for things that do not last, wages for what fails to satisfy. Today, as we interiorize the message of Isaiah, he is inviting us to come and listen as well.

Christ tells us in the Gospel that he will feed us with the Bread of Life, that we will be satisfied, all of our hunger. The Lord feeds us in many ways, but today let us focus on just one of those ways~ the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures. These readings are a call to nourish ourselves on God's Word, and we cannot do that unless we spend time with the Word.

Here are a few rhetorical questions for you to ponder, asked in all sincerity, and frankly asked of all of us. When is the last time you sat

down with the Bible and prayed with Scripture? How often do you read the Bible? How much of the Bible have you never even read? And finally, if the answers to these questions are not what they should be or what you desire them to be, what can we do about it?

Even when Jesus promised himself as the Bread of Life, he made it clear that we eat this divine Bread both by consuming his Scriptural word in faith and by consuming his body in the Holy Eucharist. Vatican II, and I quote, “forcefully and specifically exhorts all Christians to frequent reading of divine Scriptures.”¹ As St. Jerome, the patron saint of Scripture Studies once wrote, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”²

I invite you to select a book of Scripture such as one of St. Paul's letters (e.g. Romans), and begin reading it every night. Don't just “study” read. Pray with the Scripture. Since God is present in his Word, we are able to enter into conversation with Him through His Word. Read a few words, pause, and see if your heart has something to say in return. One of my favorite passages from all of Scripture comes from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: “When I found your words O Lord, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart.”³

We may begin by reading a good Catholic version of the Bible, complete with footnotes to assist our understanding, such as the New American Bible, the same translation used at Mass. This provides for consistency. Then, we meditate on the words, carefully considering their deeper meaning, mulling over the passage, placing yourself in the scene perhaps. Finally, we pray...three easy steps to using God's Sacred Word in our daily life. Read, meditate, pray.

¹ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, para. #25.

² St. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri xviii* prol.:PL 24,17B

³ Jeremiah 15:16

Today is the first few days of the new month, and if you picked any Gospel and read one chapter per day, or picked Isaiah and read two chapters a day, you would finish before Labor Day, on the first day of September. But, if we don't start something new today, we likely will not start tomorrow either- that's just how some things happen. We quickly move on with our lives. God's word is waiting for us, ready to inspire, comfort and challenge. We would all be wise to accept the invitation, for it is not from me. It is from Him, our heavenly Father inviting us to meditate upon His Word.