

I was privileged during the summer prior to my final year in the seminary to visit Israel for six weeks. It was during the summer of 1988 when, here in Minnesota, the mercury hit 90° a record 44 times. For perspective, we stand today at 15. Equally warm in Israel, we visited the very places mentioned in today's Gospel. It was much easier for me to visualize a large crowd—hungry, tired and hot—listening to Jesus, but also ill-prepared to deal with practical necessities of feeding the large crowds.

Jesus' miracle had as its principal motive that of pity and compassion, for some of the people had traveled all day and some had been away for days. All had come to hear him speak, but he first took pity and satisfied their physical hunger. Reaching their hearts began with feeding their stomachs!

This miracle should convince us that Christ is interested in our daily needs as well, just as he was in those of his contemporaries. More importantly, today's passage prepares us for the longer Bread of Life discourse that is to follow in the coming weeks at Mass. The sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel is key to the foundation of our Eucharistic theology in the Church, and today's account is the preamble.

Jesus knew that the hunger the people experienced was largely due to their desire to be in his presence—so he gave them that for which they had neglected to prepare. We should trust that His mercy will provide us even that for which we may be afraid to ask. So, what do the lay faithful want?

May I be so bold as to attempt to answer my own rhetorical question? I believe that you want faithful priests who live their vocation according to the mind of the Church. While you do not demand spiritual perfection—you **do expect** us to live our vocations with dignity and in fidelity to our sacred promises, including leading a modest life and one in accordance with virtue. You have a right to expect that— it is not a bonus prize.

You also desire reverent liturgy. Deriving from a Greek word (λειτουργία), meaning “work of the people,” liturgy is our holy work each Sunday, our best effort to praise God with minds, hearts and voices lifted towards heaven. In return, the Lord descends from heaven to feed us in the Eucharist. You desire a liturgy that calls to mind the “holy work” that takes place here– a sacred liturgy that is as reverent as it is hopefully relevant. We work hard to accomplish this goal, with lectors, cantors, organists, servers all working together to produce fitting worship of God.

Too often, we priests have let you down. Last week, a monsignor serving as General Secretary of the USCCB resigned, following allegations that involved grave misconduct against celibate chastity. His behavior not only dishonors the office of the priesthood and profoundly wounds the Body of Christ. But it also seriously compromises our ability to preach the difficult truths of the faith, such as I shared in my column about St. Paul VI’s prophetic teaching on responsible parenthood.

Some see us priests as hypocrites, unworthy of our calling. I can only offer my profound apologies and ask for your prayers for our fidelity, both with respect to our promises made at ordination, and for our faithful preaching of the Gospel. The faithful laity deserve better from us.

We serve a wide variety of people at the Cathedral, not all of whom have the same ideas, tastes or priorities. This makes it challenging to foster unity, as it simply is not possible to give to everyone everything that they desire. Saint Paul reminds us today that we are called to live with humility, gentleness and patience, “bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity” through the bond of peace.

Unity seems quite fragile now, both in society and in the Church today. It is especially disheartening when we feel powerless. Still, we must remain respectful and docile to the Holy Spirit, even if we are dismayed by a liturgical directive coming directly from the pope himself.

In difficult times such as these in the Church today, we priests are called to offer solid spiritual food, and to build up the faithful in the church today. For the next several weeks, we will hear from the 6th chapter of the Gospel of St. John, providing us with a Eucharistic “mini-course” every three years. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian life. Given a recent papal document announcing severe restrictions on the 1962 edition of the Latin Mass, many Catholics are confused and disheartened; some even feel betrayed by these sudden restrictions.

We must continue to remain faithful and hopeful; we must neither despair, nor become vindictive. Do not be afraid to ask from God that what you need, for he desires to give us all that is in accordance with His will for our lives. And do not be afraid to express your views to the competent ecclesial authorities. Canon Law is clear that the faithful “have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church...”¹

While we cannot remove all the shadows from the paths we forge, with God’s grace, we will keep our eyes fixed on the road ahead, a road that leads to union and communion with God.

Thus, live in the manner worthy of your call, humbly accepting the trials that come your way, knowing that God both desires to care for our needs, and that we assist others with the challenges that our faith presents. He is able to fill us with abundance from our own meager resources, giving us all that we need and more.

Let us never forget that our calling from God is at its heart an invitation to the fullness of the heavenly banquet, prefigured in the Holy Eucharist given to us as pure gift.

¹ Code of Canon Law, para # 208, §3