

Bishop's Reflection – 18th Sunday (Year B)

The Israelites had just crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. They had watched the Egyptian Army drown in the sea. They had finished their victory dance and sung their praises to God. In the very next story, with words of praise still fresh upon their lips, they start complaining. The sea, that prevented them from escaping from their enemies, is now preventing them from turning back.

“If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Despite everything God has already done for them, they are unable to trust in Him. How true that is of us, as well. We struggle most when we are not in control.

“I will rain bread from heaven,” God tells Moses. God also promises meat, in the form of quails, by twilight. When we are at wit's end, and no longer know how to proceed, it is God who provides.

Most of us have seen this narrative repeat itself again and again in our life. In some instances, we are so used to seeing it all work out, we no longer panic. At other times, when we are faced with a new uncertainty, we revert to our former ways. Moses is given simple instructions, and so are we. Trust in the Lord and his goodness, he will provide for you in your time of need.

Jesus warns the crowds not to put all their hope and trust in “the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” We are called to recognize the things that are rightly in our control and the things that require trust. The work of God, in us, is that we come to believe and trust, not only in the one whom he has sent, but in the goodness of those with whom God surrounds us.

But what happens when trust is broken? Be it the trust we place in Church Officials, government actions, law enforcement, institutions or spouses and family members, there are many examples where trust is undermined and doubt is sown. All of us are susceptible to moments of discouragement and doubt. It is at moments like these that we need to turn to the only one who can sustain us in our need. Only our faith in God can guard us from cynicism or despair.

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” At the root of it all, it all begins with faith. It often begins with a small action that God asks of us, as in last week's Gospel where the disciples are asked to “Sit the people down in groups” and distribute what they have. The actions may seem small and insignificant, and, yet, it is in the doing, in taking the first steps that God begins anew. For as he reminds us, “It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my father who gives you the true bread from heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Jesus teaches us to hunger for that bread, to hunger for him who is the Bread of Life. He tells us, “He who comes to me shall never be hungry, he who believes in me shall never be thirsty.” Let us turn to him in our need. Let us receive from his abundant goodness.