

Sunday 2 August 2020 Eighth Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT Almighty Lord and everlasting God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Isaiah 55:1-5. The LORD says this: Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

PSALM 145:8-9. 15-22 *R You open wide your hand, O Lord, [and satisfy the needs of every creature].* The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is loving to everyone and his compassion is over all his works. **R** The Lord upholds all those who fall; he lifts up those who are bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature. **R** The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving in all his works. The Lord is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully. He fulfils the desire of those who fear him, he hears their cry and helps them. **R** The Lord preserves all those who love him, but he destroys all the wicked. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. **R**

SECOND READING Romans 9:1-5. I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

GOSPEL Matthew 14:13-21. When Jesus heard that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

POST COMMUNION Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands that have taken holy things; may the ears which have heard your word be deaf to clamour and dispute; may the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit; may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope; and may the bodies which have been fed with your body be refreshed with the fullness of your life; glory to you for ever.

Sunday Homily 2 AUGUST 2020 8th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“And all ate and were filled.” Matthew 14:20

Much anxiety surrounds food, even in societies where food is plentiful and starvation is rare. There are regular food scares, sugars and fats are frequently seen as suspect, adverse to health. Various bacteria hit the headlines, salmonella and listeria raise their ugly heads. Medical conditions such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia affect thousands of people. Food, essential for life and meant to be enjoyed, becomes instead a threat, causing discomfort, even ill health. Where food is scarce, finding enough of anything becomes an overriding responsibility.

In the scriptures food has rich associations: from the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, where food symbolised wisdom and temptation, to manna in the desert, where it symbolised God's provision for his people. The Passover meal was a vivid commemoration of rescue from slavery. The Maccabees' refusal to eat the flesh of the pig signified their faithfulness to the Law, even in the face of death. In the New Testament, Jesus is frequently shown eating: having a meal with Martha and Mary, relaxing with friends; eating with Zacchaeus, where Jesus demonstrates his regard for people often overlooked. Dining with tax collectors and sinners is a statement of who the Son of Man came to save. And in the miracles of the loaves and fishes, food is a sign of blessing and abundance.

There was no absolute need to feed the people gathered by the shore of the lake. Even though they were in a lonely place the disciples suggested dispersing the crowd to the villages to buy their own food. But Jesus suggests otherwise; he responds to this need, among their other needs. Although he had intended to withdraw from the public gaze to ponder the Baptist's death, he took pity on the people and healed their sick. And, having healed them, he responded to another immediate, pressing need. They were hungry and they needed to be fed. Once again, the presence of Christ is a blessing in more ways than one. From meagre resources a huge crowd is satisfied with plenty left over. Indeed, twelve baskets, which signified abundance for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Where people are anxious, Jesus brings reassurance. Where they are confused, he brings enlightenment. Where they are sick, he brings healing. And where they are hungry, he brings bread. It is clear that the ministry of Christ is not just to the spirit or the soul, but to the whole person. He is not just food for the spirit, but food for the body also. The Good News is not merely an idea but a complete renewal of life.

So where there is anxiety about food, about what is safe to eat and what is not safe; when there is worry about whether there will be enough on the plate; where food seems to threaten as well as nourish, Jesus' use of food points the way. Here he brings together much of the symbolism associated with food. As in the desert of old, food here represents God's provision for people. Food represents deliverance and Jesus' concern for the marginalised, those whom the Son of Man came to save. In the taking of the bread, the blessing, breaking and distributing, food points to the sacrifice of Christ and to his abiding presence in the Eucharist.

Food represents an opportunity in the Gospel of Christ. As in the Garden of Eden, it suggests the desirability of true wisdom and the necessity of resisting temptation. When we are anxious about the future, the provision of manna in the desert reminds us of God's generosity and care. Passover reminds us of the saving power of God, and the story of the Maccabees is an example of perseverance in the face of extreme adversity. Jesus eating with Martha and Mary demonstrates the value he placed upon friendship and fellowship. His meal with Zacchaeus, with tax collectors and sinners, makes clear that every person is worthy of respect. And the miracle of the loaves and fishes is a rich reminder of the mission of Jesus to proclaim the kingdom, to heal, to nourish and to bless.

The greatest meal of all, the Last Supper, brings together all the symbolism of food in the ministry of Jesus. When anxious, hungry, and in any kind of need, we remember how the Lord provides and how we too should provide for others in his name.