

Open a bible, light a candle, and place a small loaf of bread at the center of your faith-sharing circle.

LEADER: Let us affirm and testify that our lives are not futile.

ALL: Let us live what we have learned in Christ.

LEADER: Let us put away any other ways of life—power shopping, social climbing, exploiting others, gating our lives to keep others out and their needs distant.

ALL: Let us live what we have learned in Christ.

LEADER: Renew the spirit of our minds.

ALL: In the likeness of Christ.

LEADER: Sustain us in true justice and holiness.

ALL: In the likeness of God.

LEADER: Help us acquire a taste for God's word.

ALL: In the Spirit of God. Amen.

Sunday's gospel has both good news and bad news for Jesus. The good news is that the 5,000 people he fed want more from him. The crowd follows him around the Sea of Galilee. The bad news is the people have missed the point of his teaching.

The crowds want another sign if they are to believe Jesus is from God, a miracle greater than the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. They fail to

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

see that Jesus' teaching, healing, loving presence is the sign of God among them. Sunday's scripture readings challenge us today to recognize the signs God sets before us and reflect on what really satisfies our hungers.

Making friends gives us one of our most common experiences of hungering and yearning for more. When a relationship begins and two people start getting to know each other, they want to be with each other more and more. Each wants to discover who the other is, what he or she is about, what and who is important in the other's life.

Other experiences, too, give us a taste of something that leaves us wanting to continue. A new book entices one to join a book club. A view out the window at a meeting leads one to buy hiking shoes on the way home. An encounter with a friend leads to help with a gardening project. A church bulletin posts the need for volunteers at the day drop in for homeless

people. You go once, twice, and become regular. A few minutes in church leads to making time for quiet another day and another. First steps can lead to longer journeys.

Faith may become a hunger for deeper understanding and lead some people to join a prayer group or a scripture study. Often people fear groups that may ask them to share not just ideas, but our hearts. A group that listens to our hearts may become a circle of belonging.

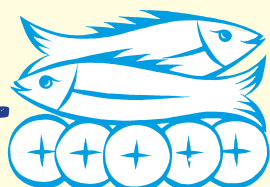
A hunger for justice may challenge us to rally a group that pursues legislative action. A hunger that won't be satisfied is the nudge of the Holy Spirit.

What if God who most of the time lets me alone, suddenly starts asking what I am looking for?

● What recent experience have you had of God appearing or disappearing in your life?



GOSPEL



Art/Ade Bethune

Whoever believes in Jesus will never hunger.

NARRATOR: The next day when the people saw that both Jesus and his disciples had gone, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked—

PEOPLE: Rabbi, when did you come here?

JESUS: Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.

PEOPLE: What must we do to perform the works of God?

JESUS: This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom God has sent.

PEOPLE: What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “God gave them bread from heaven to eat.”

JESUS: Very truly, I tell you, 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.

PEOPLE: Sir, give us this bread always.

JESUS: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6.24-35

search. He suggests that they seek him only because they ate their fill. They do not recognize the One who provides them the food, nor do they take up the work this One gives them to do.

Jesus the teacher uses their experience to tease them beyond the tangible. “Do not work for food that perishes,” he urges them, “but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man, will give you.”

The crowd bites. In John’s gospel Jesus often creates misunderstanding in conversations to draw people deeper. The crowd nibbles on his bait. They ask “What must we do to perform the works of God?”

Jesus’ answer is direct and easy-to-understand. “The work of God is believing in the one whom God has sent.” Believing in Jesus creates a dividing line among the Jews in the A.D. 90s when John writes.

Ironically, these same people who yesterday ate the abundant food only the messiah could provide this day refuse to believe without a sign. They accepted food from Jesus’ hands but now they ask what work he performs.

Their questions demonstrate that the abundant bread was no sacrament to them, no sign revealing God’s presence among them in Jesus. They ate, but they did not believe.

● What sign makes you most certain you believe God sent Jesus?

● What causes you to lose faith?

What hungers do we really want to satisfy?

The crowd in last Sunday’s gospel ate their fill of barley loaves. They decided on the basis of this sign that Jesus must be a prophet, but they have literally and figuratively missed the boat. The people who have eaten their fill wake up the next morning to find neither Jesus, whom they wanted to make king, nor his disciples among them.

The people set out in boats to find Jesus. When they find him, they address him as rabbi, according him a teacher’s authority. But the question they ask him is superficial, “When did you come here?” They seem to object to his being outside their command and control.

In answering the crowd, Jesus challenges the superficiality of their religious



The people seek a sign as convincing as the manna, which their wandering ancestors ate during their 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus questions how well the crowd remembers Israel's traditions. He suggests they have forgotten half the story, namely, that the manna came from God, not Moses, and that they make the same mistake if they do not recognize he comes from heaven. He is the bread of God come down to give life to the world.

Again, the people bite. They want the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world. They address Jesus with respect as they ask, "Sir, give us this bread always!"

In Jesus' conversation with the crowd, John's gospel traces a step-by-step invitation to faith. With the crowd asking for the life-giving bread of God, Jesus has them ready to see who he really is. "I am the bread of life," he announces.

John deliberately claims for Jesus the divine name *I am*, a name so holy that the people of Israel never pronounce it aloud but say *Adonai* instead. God reveals the name Yahweh to Moses at the burning bush. The name means *I Am Who Causes to Be*. Repeatedly in John's gospel Jesus uses the divine *I am* to reveal himself.

As if identifying himself as the divine *I Am* were not a sufficient leap of faith, Jesus tantalizes the crowd with the paradox that whoever comes to him will never be hungry and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. Jesus first calls the crowd beyond the bread they have eaten to see its source, God the creator of life, and then calls them to put their faith in him, the one whom God has sent.

Like Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24, whose table is the abundant fare of all creation, Jesus identifies himself with bread and life.

To teach who he is, Jesus appeals to two basic needs every human experiences—hunger and thirst.

Only faith in Jesus, the living bread, will satisfy our hunger forever. Those who eat the bread of life take this food inside themselves. In this act they express their wholehearted faith that Jesus comes from God, and they become themselves God's bread for others.

● What do you make of Jesus' promise that you will never be hungry or thirsty again?

● Who do you feed in your daily life and work?

● To what do your parish Eucharistic meals call you as a community of believers?



God feeds Israel on its journey.

In Sunday's first reading, Israel reaches a place in their relationship with God and each other where going back seems better than going on. The harshness, hunger, and unknowns of the desert transform their memories of being slaves in Egypt. They forget the oppression and remember only the certainty of meat and bread to keep their stomachs full.

The whole congregation of Israel in the desert cries out to Moses, "You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." They feel the God

who opened the sea to their freedom must have abandoned them. Ironically, they think that hunger will kill them, when true hunger for God and the bread God gives are the very things that give them life.

God promises Moses to provide both meat and bread that the people might recognize in the gift the God who gives life, provides, feeds, and accompanies them. God will test their knowing and teach them through this deed. God hears Israel's cry and acts. Will Israel recognize the deed and its living Source?

Quail come in the evening, and manna in the morning. All goes as God promises. But, when the people see God's gift, the manna, the Israelites say to one another, "What is it?" This is the meaning of the word; manna is *what's it*. The people don't recognize manna as gift of God to satisfy their hunger and see them on their future way. Moses must explain to them, "It is the bread God has given you to eat."

The Israelites cry out.

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the

wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "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."

Then the Holy One said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not."

The Holy One spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Holy One your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp. In morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Holy One has given you to eat."

Exodus 16.2-4,12-15

● When have you, in the process of doing a task, creating a project or pursuing a relationship, come

to a place where going forward seems so difficult or impossible that going back to the way you were seems much better and more desirable?

● Where is God providing you bread and life today?

● Where do you see God providing such bread for the Church or for your civic community?

PRAY

Pass the loaf to each person in the circle. Each person breaks off a piece and names one place where God's abundance and care are in short supply and/or one place where each will bring food and care this week.

SING: "I Am the Bread of Life," *Gather* #828.

*I am the bread of life
you who come to me
shall not hunger;
you who believe in me
shall not thirst.*

*No one can come to me
unless the Father beckons.*

*And I will raise you up,
And I will raise you up,
And I will raise you up on
the last day.*



*Joan Mitchell, CSJ,
the editor of SUNDAY
BY SUNDAY, holds a
Masters of Theological
Studies from Harvard
Divinity School and a
Ph.D. in New Testament
from Luther Seminary in
St. Paul, MN.*



ONLINE RETREATS

Good Ground Press has three online retreats for your prayer and reflection.

- Busy Person's Retreat
- Living the Our Father
- Why Not Soar?

Go to goodgroundpress.com and click on online retreats. You can make the retreat online or download and print the pages.

goodgroundpress.com