



18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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A little girl walked to and from school every day. One morning the weather looked bad. By afternoon the wind had whipped up, and lightening began to crackle in the sky. The girl's mother, full of concern, got into her car and drove along the road to school. She spotted her daughter walking up the street. At each flash of lightening, the child would stop, look up, and smile. The mother drove up alongside the child, lowered her car window and called, "What are you doing?" The child answered, "I'm trying to look pretty because God keeps taking my picture."

Unfortunately, as we get older, we get more sophisticated. We know God isn't up there with a flash camera. But this little girl was able to go beyond just seeing some flashes of light in the sky to see the presence of God. Are we able to go beyond the appearance, and see the hand of God—the face of God? Or, are we like the people of the Old Testament who were complaining, despite the fact that God gave them manna every day without having to work for it?

Or, are we like the people of the gospel who asked, "What signs can you work for us so that we may believe in you?"—after having just seen Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. To them Jesus said, "I will give you the bread of eternal life," meaning the Eucharist.

When Jesus realized that the people wanted to make him their king, he retreated to the mountain by himself. They would have been happy with him as their king because they would not need to work for their food. But Jesus did not want to make them dependent. He always reached out to the needy but then sent them out to work for their bread.

We continue today with our five-week study of the sixth chapter of John. The people were not concerned with the sign that he performed. They were just concerned with free food.

Feeding 5,000 was a sign pointing to something else. Jesus used a lot of material things but drew people's attention to something they pointed to.

In liturgy we use a lot of material things: wine, water, bread, oil, candles, etc. These are not ends in themselves. Pay attention to what they point to. We have to go beyond these material things, and focus on that they represent. It is not material things that bring us happiness, satisfaction or contentment but what they represent. For example, look at the crucifix. That is just wood and a clay figure of Jesus. But we have to go beyond the material things and remember what Jesus did for us. The cross is a sign of hope and victory. It reminds us of God's eternal love for us in His son, Jesus. That is what brings us joy, faith and satisfaction.

Let me know if material things have brought you the happiness, joy and satisfaction that you were looking for. You thought the newest iPhone would solve all your problems? But a few days later, you realized that it was not new anymore. You realized that Siri, Alexa and Google did not have all the answers for life that you were looking for. You thought a new car, a new home or a new handbag had the key to your happiness. A few weeks later you realized that they failed to bring the happiness you hoped for. Material things will bring us frustrations if we do not see what they point to and what they are truly intended for.

Let us look beyond appearances—beyond the material things. Mother Teresa could look beyond the filth and sores of the people she cared for and see the face of Jesus. Mahatma Gandhi and John Paul II could look into the faces of their assassins, and recognize a brother whom they could forgive. Jesus could look beyond the sins of the woman caught in adultery, and see in her a daughter of God. Jesus was able to look beyond the sins of Zacchaeus, and see in him a child of God.

If we are to accept the bread that God gives to us in Jesus, it is essential to look beyond it to see the body and blood of Christ. Learning to look beyond in this way remains the challenge of the Eucharist. What is the food that we need? The food is Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is the sacramental expression of this food. The Eucharist is our union with the Lord, loving us even to dying on the cross. Truly, the Eucharist is the most significant of the many ways that we receive and eat the Bread of Life. The Holy Eucharist that we receive is food for our souls, giving us a share in God's life.

If we attach our happiness to material things, we will continue to experience frustrations. But let us attach happiness to what they point to and what they are intended for by God. When we use them for what they are intended, we will find the joy and happiness that we are looking for.