

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)
5TH AUGUST 2012

We hear today how God feeds his people with manna, and I have often wondered what manna is. But this is the wrong question to ask, since more important is understanding its symbolic value.

Now, I am not commenting on the rights or wrongs of how people react, but over the past year or two we have heard many people complaining about all the changes that have happened in Weymouth. It's ranged from having or not having the relief road; roundabouts vs. traffic lights; fairy lights or lasers, then concern it will be too busy here, and now it's about the lack of crowds!. People are able to be grumble about almost anything; they want to return to the past and its perceived security.

Well, not much has changed, the Israelites were grumbling too. In fact, they wished they were back in Egypt where they could die as slaves, but with the security of thinking they at least wouldn't be hungry! This is a warning for us today, we mustn't let ourselves to be slaves to the past and things that we just want; for surely God does give us what we need (and more).

Anyway, God hears their grumbling and he answers them. He feeds their physical need, but with the answer comes a question. Will they recognise what they have received is from God, and will they then trust him? Indeed, do we recognise that one way or another everything we have comes, ultimately, from God? And will we trust him as we say

“Give us this day our daily bread” or are we too pre-occupied with the past or the future.

So the manna is more than just physical food. It also prefigures Jesus in the Eucharist and represents spiritual food, namely God’s word. Jesus himself confirms our spiritual needs when he is tempted in the desert. He says “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”. In the Gospel last week Jesus gave the people all the food they could eat. In today’s Gospel the people wanted more food, and Jesus tells them that this is why they followed him. But what he can really give them is spiritual food – he is the bread of life. And that if they accept him they will never be hungry or thirsty again. He stirred up their enthusiasm with the miracle and now tells them what is really important is faith in him. He is saying this to us as well.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, shows that he understood this. He saw that the manna pre-figured Jesus and it goes beyond just the physical nature. He is firm in how he speaks, saying that if they carry on living the aimless life of the pagans then they never really listened to the message of Jesus. We may ask ourselves, where is our focus? Do we take on board what Jesus tells us?

“Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution” Paul says.

Revolution? Not, oh by the way it would be nice if you changed how you think and so perhaps how you behave. No, a revolution involves fighting, major changes and destruction of what is old. There is a battle going on for our minds. We may not want to hear this, but it is true.

You know, business leaders try to give the public what they want because material profit is important to them. Spiritual leaders can't do this; they must challenge people to go beyond what they want to what they need. Jesus could have earned himself even more short term favour by feeding the crowds again, but instead he told them truth. Indeed, soon after this event in John's Gospel many followers leave Jesus because they can't handle his message.

Physical hunger is easy to feel and see; spiritual hunger can be hard to recognise. Our culture has grown to neglect this...and the results are being seen (statistically with our increasing wealth we have seen a parallel increase in breakdowns and violence and unhappiness).

So, this battle for our minds is real. What is fantastic is that by being here today we hear God's truth through the readings and in the liturgies. This gives us the chance for our minds to be renewed so that this spiritual revolution can occur. Then, we can do as Paul says and put on the new self that God has created.

The NIV bible reads "clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God". That likeness is love, kindness, gentleness etc... This isn't easy. I, for one, can get grumpy. After a day at work I am going home to a lovely family God has blessed me with. Now, they deserve love when I get home, but I might be affected by everything that's happened during the day, and I am clothed in "tiredness and grumpiness" – I am wearing my old self according to Paul. So here's the great thing, if I come to Jesus as he asks, he will satisfy my thirst and hunger; I am refreshed. Then, I can put on my new

self; I can literally put on love and gentleness. We can all use our minds and imagine clothing ourselves in love and kindness. Try it.

So in summary, God cares for what we need physically and spiritually. He gives us what we need to eat and offers us himself in the Eucharist and through his word. If we receive him we won't live aimlessly we will have purpose and a focus. We will have a revolution of our minds which will let us "put on" our clothes of love and kindness.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser