

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE



On this 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time we continue reading from Chapter 6 of John's Gospel. Jesus has now crossed the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. The crowds have followed and Jesus begins a dialogue with them.

The dialogue is a feature of John's Gospel. It is a literary device that John's Gospel uses to explore the deeper meaning behind the miracle of the loaves and the fish.

The context remains the Jewish feast of the Passover and the essential background to understand this scene is the story of the Exodus. That is why the first reading on this Sunday is taken from chapter 16 of the Book of Exodus.

During their journey through the wilderness, God provided food for the people in the form of fine flakes that gathered on the ground like dew. The people collected the flakes to make bread and called the flakes "manna".

Now in John's Gospel, Jesus reminds the crowd that it was not Moses but God who provided the bread from heaven.

In the dialogue that follows, Jesus makes a solemn statement that sets the scene for the exchange that follows: "it was not Moses...it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven."

The crowd demand another miracle, "Sir, give us this bread always" – they are still thinking that this is about ordinary bread. Jesus replies "I am the bread of life". Jesus himself is the gift of the Father for the life of the world.

Now we begin to understand that the feeding of the crowds with the loaves and fish was not just about feeding the hungry.

In John's Gospel there are a series of "I am" statements that are part of the ongoing dialogue between Jesus and the people: I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Resurrection and the Life; I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; I am the True Vine. In these "I am" statements, John's Gospel explores the different ways Jesus meets our needs and how he fulfils our deepest longing – to share in the very life of God.

We will continue to explore how Jesus, the Bread of Life, is inviting us to become one with him when we return to John's Gospel on 22 August.

Next Sunday 8 August, the Australian Church celebrates St Mary MacKillop and then on 15 August we will celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Those two solemn feasts take precedence over the 19th and 20th Sundays in Ordinary Time.

Paul Crowley

Published in St Mary's Parish Concord Bulletin 1 August 2021