

# Sermon for Sunday, August 9, 2009

## Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

By JoAnn Taylor

**First Lesson**      **2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33**

**Psalm**              **130**

**Second Lesson**    **Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

**Gospel**             **John 6:35,41-51**

...In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

No matter where you are in your travels, one of your favorite smells has to be fresh bread. You know what I mean....hot out of the oven, dripping with butter, cinnamon, jelly, cheese or other toppings. The odor carries throughout the house, even to those outside, bringing with it the warmth and comfort of memories.....reminders of home and family when we are far away. Bread is also an important part of a balanced diet and in some parts of the world a main stay of nutrition for the poor and under-privileged.

Today's gospel continues the theme of Jesus as the 'living bread' that comes from heaven – the bread of eternal life. But the people have a hard time with this idea – they know him as the son of Joseph and Mary...a carpenter like his 'father'. They don't comprehend idea of Jesus as the bread of heaven. To them, this idea borders on sacrilege – a severe offense against God. They don't understand how Jesus can 'come down from heaven' or how he 'can be the way to the Father' [God]. They don't understand how he can give them his 'flesh' to eat. In fact, they don't understand any part of what Jesus is talking about. They don't see the symbolism – only the literal meaning and they reject his words.

Let's ask ourselves some questions. Do we believe Jesus is the 'bread of life'? Do we believe that God still cares about us today? Does God still support and sustain us in our daily lives or are we homeless wanderers? Can we be fed with the 'bread of angels'?

The answers to those questions are to be found in the name of Jesus -'Immanuel' – God with us. God came to earth through his only Son – to live as we live....and to give up his life for us so that our relationship with God could be repaired – our sins forgiven. The words 'Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you...' these words, which we hear each Sunday in the eucharistic prayer, are what this gospel passage is all about....Jesus' body, his flesh – 'the bread' – which is broken for us – a bread more sustaining than the 'bread of angels'. [pause]

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, one of the founders of western monasticism, Basil the Great, quoted a poem that is as appropriate today, as it was to the time in which he lived. It says:

The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of one who is naked. The shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor. The acts of charity you do not perform are so many injustices you commit.

Jesus would have strongly agreed with those words. They are the core of ministry – ministry in its purest form. We show our agreement with Basil's words every time we support our local Good Will stores, our homeless shelters, and our food banks. Every week a small group of women and men in this parish perform this ministry through the St. Francis Clothes Closet. Every week they see 80 to

100 families come through our doors seeking clothing and other items for themselves and their families. People of all ages, sizes, race and religion come here.....and are blessed in their need. No limits and no cost.....Jesus and Basil would be greatly pleased by this ministry.

But, the bread of our existence is not just the food that we eat– we need ‘mental bread’ as well. Mimi Farina and J. Oppenheim in their song, ‘Bread and Roses’ say, ‘Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but also give us roses.’ Little words like ‘I care; I love you; Good work; You look beautiful; and more’ are the bread of the heart. We should keep this in mind when dealing with others – especially those whom we love and care for. If we don’t say the words – even though our actions may show we love them – we haven’t expressed it verbally and they may not ‘hear’ what we are trying to tell them. If they don’t hear what we are telling them, their souls will starve for the love and affection – the bread – that it needs to survive. They may become depressed or bitter or angry because they don’t ‘feel’ that we love them.

An article from SpiritLed Woman magazine, by Jo Kadlecsek, talks about the four spiritual food groups. In her article she states that just as we must eat a balanced diet to maintain physical health, we must also follow a balanced spiritual diet in order to maintain spiritual health. At the top of the pyramid are Contemplation and Solitude. These are the meat and dairy products of our spiritual diet. Contemplation is the normal means by which we, as Christians, can abandon the chaos of our lives to reflect on God’s will. This time is essential for our growth – personally and spiritually. To remain balanced Christians, we must seek solitude with God – we must find the time to listen for the still small voice of his call. Without contemplation and solitude, we become overworked, overdriven and suffer from burn-out. Only in solitude do we learn the value of resting in God’s presence.

The next level is Service. This is the vegetables and fruits of our spiritual diet. A life of service can keep us from a life of despair, or self-pity during difficult times. It can keep us in spiritual balance by helping us to look upward and outward. When we care for the needs of others and share God’s love with them, we plant ourselves firmly in the hope that is found in Christ. God wishes to show his compassion through us. We don’t have to live among the urban poor as some do, but we do have to be open to serving as God tells us to. Then the Holy Spirit will lead us to the projects and activities that God has set aside for us to do.

The base of the pyramid is Community. This is the bread – the solid base on which all else is founded. If we serve apart from the guidance, fellowship, and encouragement of God, then we suffer burn-out and do little good for God’s kingdom. If we remain too much in a place of solitude, we can become paralyzed by isolation, withdraw from the presence of others, and suffer from loneliness. We are social animals and need to interact with people regularly in order to move along in our faith journey. My recent trip to Toronto was exactly that – a time of solitude, quiet, and interaction with others who were on a similar faith journey – an opportunity to hear what they were doing with their lives just as I shared what was happening in mine.....an opportunity to grow, to learn and to feed each other.

The word community comes from the Latin *communitas* . It is also the root word for commute, communion, communication, and commune. Let’s examine these words. Communion is the means by which we symbolically join our hearts with God through the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ – the eucharistic feast. Communicate is when we join our speaking and listening with others – family, friends, strangers, groups, etc.

Commune is a group of people who have forsaken the ways of the world to join their lives together. Not necessarily a bad thing – monastics live in a world of close community – not always peaceful, but joined together in loving service to God.

Commute is traveling from the suburbs to the city to work – joining our two ‘worlds’ together.

To become balanced Christians, we need to nurture relationships, to share a common vision, to bear each others burdens, to seek reconciliation and forgiveness, to play together and to show the world that we are Jesus’ disciples.

Learning to love God and to receive his love is an on-going process that occurs in a multitude of ways. If we fail to keep our spiritual balance, we run the risk of losing our identity in the crowd rather than shining like the light that God intended us to be. [pause] We can spend hours in prayer, serve at local missions, and spend lots of time building relationships and still be leading a lopsided Christian life. By integrating the four food groups of spirituality into our lives, we can become energetic, balanced in faith, and peaceful.

Bread...the staff of life. Jesus as the ‘living bread’ is the staff of our lives in God. Whenever we eat of the eucharistic bread and drink of the wine (the blood of Christ), we celebrate that joining of our hearts and souls with God – secure in God’s eternal love and affection.

Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. This is our invitation to the feast. Next Sunday, when you approach the altar and kneel to receive the bread and wine, remember that the one who gave himself for you is also the one who sits at the head of the table, smiling and calling you to join him.

Amen.