

## Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

The readings and prayers of today's Mass remind us of God's providential care for us. He gives us bread from heaven. As a way of penetrating more deeply into this truth, I would like to reflect with you on one of the petitions which we make in the 'Our Father': 'Give us this day our daily bread'.

The first point to notice is that we pray just for today: Give us this day our daily bread. The **First Reading**, from Exodus, stresses this truth. They could not store the manna. God gave it to them in the desert day by day. We can't control the supply to give us independent security for tomorrow. God will provide today, and we will have to trust that God will provide tomorrow. It is so hard for most of us to really live in the present moment and to trust that God is, in fact, looking after us now. We are pretty fragile, and we are easily frightened by the dark clouds that loom up on the horizon. We fear for tomorrow, and we would like to be secure against tomorrow's dangers. A lot of the financial advice given to us feeds off this insecurity, and, if we are not careful, we can spend so much time worrying about the future, and all the possible things that could go wrong, that we miss the real life we are living - which, of course, is the present moment. The future will become real only when it is present to us - and then, we are asked to believe God will give us what we need to sustain us for the journey.

This idea is rather beautifully expressed in a love-poem by a Canadian Jesuit, John l'Heureux:

'Love, weave no cloak against tomorrow.  
Even should the harsh wind chill you to the marrow,  
shaking your lean frame,  
yet do not wonder nor sorrow.  
Love, do not weep that Spring trees yellow.  
Even if there be no summer sung beneath the willow,  
shielding the heart's wound,  
yet trust another Spring will follow.  
Love, light no lamp against tomorrow.  
Even though the night wind has stripped our summer willow,  
your heart will find dawn,  
here within my heart's small hollow'.

God is love, and he is telling us that we have a place in his heart, and that, no matter what happens to us, he will always be there, caring for us. Tomorrow is in God's hands. He will still be there, gracing us, sustaining us, loving us, supporting us through whatever trial may come.

The Greek word which we translate 'daily' in the expression 'give us this day our daily bread' is '*epiousios*', a word found nowhere else in the Bible. In fact it is not found in any other text in ancient Greek. It seems to mean 'the bread that really matters', the bread that is all-important, the bread that we really need, now. A better translation may be: 'Give us the nourishment we really need today'. From the beginning, the 'Our Father' was used, as it still is today, to prepare for the receiving of Jesus in communion. We are praying to receive the life of Jesus into our hearts, for he is the bread we really need for life, since life is communion with God. As Jesus says in today's Gospel: 'He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never

thirst'.

Sometimes what we want or desire is, as Paul says in the **Second Reading**, 'illusory', and part of the aimless life into which we have drifted. We don't often have the wisdom to know what is best for us. We are asked to trust that what we really need we will be given. No more and no less. God not only knows what is best for us, but God also knows the right timing. Like a good parent, God may not give us what we think we want, and God may know that it is necessary that we have to wait to receive his grace if it is really going to transform our lives and open us up to what we really need. Both aspects - leaving the future in God's care, and accepting that God is now giving us what we really need - both of these demand great trust. And it is on this point of trust that I would like to reflect with you now.

In saying that we should live in the present moment, trusting that God is gracing us with all that we really need to live in communion with him a life of love, we are not talking about foolhardy carelessness that has no concern for the consequences of our actions and leaves it to everyone else to pick up the pieces. We are talking about radical trust. We will never be tried beyond our capacity, and we will always be graced with whatever we need to live our present moment lovingly, even if it be from a cross which we would like not to be on. Saint Peter tells us: 'Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you'(1Peter 5:7).

At times, like Jesus, we are right to cry out to God in our pain and plead with him to hurry and help us. The author of the psalms prays with urgency: 'Let your compassion come speedily to meet us, O Lord, for we are brought very low'(Psalm 79:8). 'I am poor and needy, but the Lord keep me in mind. You are my help, my deliverer. Do not delay, O my God'(Psalm 40:17).

The **Responsorial Psalm** celebrates the fact that God fed his people during their desert journey and brought them to the Promised Land. However, if you take the time to read the whole psalm, it is a plea for trust. The author is astonished that, in spite of all that God had done for his ancestors, they still failed to trust him. Are we any different? The psalmist reminds us that even when we fail to trust, God persists in loving us, trying to get us to enjoy the peace of soul which those only have who place their trust in him, no matter what. 'Can a woman forget her child at the breast, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you'(Isaiah 49:15). 'As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him'(Psalm 103:13).

Whoever we are, and wherever we are at this stage of our life, we are invited to a deeper level of trust. No person and no circumstance can stop us loving, and that is all that God asks of us, and it is the most beautiful way to spend the present moment, which, after all, is the only existence we have. Let not anxiety for the future rob us of our real life now, and let us trust that however deprived we are, however painful our relationships, however disappointed in ourselves or in others we are, God is offering us all we really need to live now a life of love. If we have the courage to trust God, we will know the peace of the Holy Spirit.

John of the Cross has this advice for us: 'When something distasteful or unpleasant comes your way, remember Christ crucified and be silent. Live in faith and hope, even though you are in darkness, because it is in this darkness that God protects the soul. Cast your care upon God, for He watches over you and will not forget you. Do not think that He leaves you alone; that would

be an affront to Him'(John of the Cross, Pentecost 1590).

And Julian of Norwich: 'He did not say, "you shall not be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work-weary, you shall not be discomforted." But he did say, "You shall not be overcome". God wants us to heed these words so that we shall always be strong in trust, both in sorrow and in joy.'(Showings, ch. 68)