

Sunday, August 04, 2024
The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist
11:00 am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

on

John 6:24-35

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A Reflection on Life This summer Day

How are you all doing in this hot summer? It might be a little different in the city, but we can feel the vitality of the season—trees lush and green, nights filled with the sounds of insects. This summer, more than ever, is brimming with life. As millions of tourists flock to the city, our surroundings become alive and vibrant too. I hope that through today's Gospel, we can take time to reflect on the life we enjoy and the meaning of Jesus calling Himself the bread of life.

The crowds flocked to Jesus because they had seen the miracle of healing the sick. They persistently seek Him because they ate their fill of bread through the miracle of feeding the five thousand. They come by boat from Tiberias to find Him, as if they were playing tag, and when Jesus is not there, they cross the lake to Capernaum. Their passion in pursuing Him is truly impressive. The scene where they go by boat to Capernaum to find Jesus and ask, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" almost feels like stalking. However, we need to look closely at their deep longing and passion. And I invite you to reflect on why the church is declining in this modern age of abundance and why it is difficult to see such longing and passion anymore. Jesus says directly, "The reason you desire me so much is because of the bread that filled your stomach. But what I want to give you, what you can get from me, is incomparable to that."

Do we have a heart that earnestly seeks Jesus like them? If so, why? Is it because of some need, such as to be healed or to be filled? It is like asking for a glass of water from someone who can give us a spring that never dries up, or asking for a loaf of bread to fill our hungry stomachs from someone who can give us the bread of heaven, the food of eternal life. Jesus can give us so much more than we ask. However, I believe that Jesus does not take our needs and difficulties lightly. The miracle of feeding the five thousand was accomplished purely by Jesus' will to feed them. Nevertheless, He tells us not to strive for food that will perish but to strive for food that endures for eternal life. That is what He wants to give us.

What is the longing for Him that is within us now? In an age when we enjoy more material abundance than ever before, and after becoming an advanced country where most of the food, clothing, and housing issues have been resolved to some extent, the decline of the church urges us to reflect on the driving force behind our faith and church growth. Was the reason we longed for Jesus so much only because of our hunger and thirst? Now that those issues have been resolved, do we no longer need Jesus? Some may try to satisfy their own desires by promising greater worldly things. But no one

should sell the name of Jesus for their own gain. As Fr. Preston preached last Sunday, Jesus will not be used by them.

What Jesus wants to give us is beyond what we can dare to ask for. What He wants to give us in the hand we stretch out for a piece of perishable bread is Himself. Can we bear Him? Can we bear His love? To bear Him with our whole body, mind, and soul, and to surrender ourselves completely to His love, that is faith, and the church is the gathering of those who have that faith. Should our longing for His presence, our passion for His love, be less than those who searched for Him around the shores of the Sea of Galilee?

People ask Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God? And “What work are you performing?” We tend to think that we have to do something to get anything. We probably had to do something to be loved and accepted. However, Jesus says that the gift He wants to give us, the bread that will live forever and never run out, the spring of water that will never dry up, is not something we earn by doing anything. It is something we receive freely through grace. We can enjoy true life with the bread of life that He gives us, who loves and accepts us just as we are. We don’t have to think about what we must do to get it. There is no price that we can pay to receive such a precious thing. We simply bow our heads in gratitude for the grace we receive from heaven.

The bread of life isn’t just about surviving; it’s about being fully alive. But what does it mean to be fully alive? I believe it’s about being grateful for who we are at our core, embracing ourselves fully, and attaining wholeness. When we’re constantly hungry and thirsty, we feel like something’s missing. We crave validation, see everything as a competition, and often view others as adversaries. Those who have not tasted the Bread of Life live with insatiable want as their driving force. But remember that Jesus calls out to those in need, and anyone can learn from Him to live a life of gratitude and trust in God.

I believe that the reason the church and Christianity have not died out in this era is that among the countless people who followed Jesus over the past 2000 years, there were not just those who ate their fill of the loaves, but there were those who understood the meaning of the miracle. It was more than simply breaking the law of conservation of mass and demonstrating His transcendent power to turn a small amount of matter into a large amount. It was to let us taste that His love is so abundant and complete that it can quench any hunger or thirst. His love is a love that even willingly chooses to become our food so we can become one with Him and live true life. The reason we go to church every Sunday and share His body and blood is to remember that love, to confirm that the life we enjoy is eternal life, and to know who we are as one with Him. We can try to remember and confirm this as often as possible, wherever we are. We can pray anytime, anywhere, focusing our minds on the breath we breathe in and out, remembering that the breath we breathe at this moment is no different from the breath Jesus breathed. If we accept the bread of life and let it become our blood and flesh, wouldn’t our lives somehow resemble the life of Jesus? In closing, I would like to share one of the poems that touched my heart the most this summer.

The Summer day

Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean —

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?
