

# Homily, 5 August 2012

## Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 16:2-4,12-15; Psalm 78:3-4,23-24,25,54; Ephesians 4:17,20-24; John 6:24-35

### *I am the bread of life*



Jesus responded to the crowd ... "*you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.*"

The people had missed the *significance* of the miracle. They saw the loaves, but failed to see that God was with them. God, who did not simply want to feed them for a day, but who reached out to them with a promise of eternal life.

Jesus said to them, "*I am the bread of life.*"

But perhaps they didn't want what Jesus offered. Maybe they did not really want *eternal life*.



In his encyclical *Saved in Hope*, Pope Benedict wondered if people of our day want that too.

*Do we really want this, asked the Pope, to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive.*

*What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment.*

*To continue living forever — endlessly — appears more like a curse than a gift. We want to postpone death as long as possible. But to live always — without end — would be monotonous and ultimately unbearable.*

So ... we do not want to die, but neither do we want to live indefinitely. What do we really want?

*Our paradoxical attitude, the Pope notes, gives rise to a deeper question: what, in fact, is "life"?*

St. Augustine said that we have no idea what we ultimately desire, what we would really like. Even in those moments when we think we can reach out and touch it, it eludes us.

It is unknown ... and yet we are drawn to it.

This *unknown thing* is the true hope that drives us, argued the Pope, and "eternal life" is the name we give to this thing, though as a name for it, it is inadequate and creates confusion.



The words "Eternal Life" may often make us think of eternity ... of time. That's the problem.

When Jesus said "I am the bread of life," he was calling people back into a relationship with God, to the true relationship between God and man that existed before the fall.

Like the Prodigal Son, we had cast aside that which was truly good, for our vain pursuits. Rejecting our most profound relationship was the original sin, and it is still the fundamental nature of all our sins.

Like the father in that parable, who went to meet his wayward son on the road, Jesus stands with open arms waiting patiently for us to return, to accept his embrace and be reconciled.



Heaven is another name for the unknown thing we desire so much. If you have trouble imaging "eternal life," then just imagine heaven.

I am sure you have all had little epiphanies, -- fleeting moments when heaven seemed so present. Sometimes those moments occurred with those you love, but even in those moments when you were alone, you may have sensed that God was showing you something or with you in some other way.

Our fleeting glimpses of heaven are very much relational, and ... they are timeless.



I don't know if you have ever read or seen the play "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder, but when I read it in high school, one little part, one little dialog, caught my attention and I have never forgotten it. It's a conversation between Dr. Gibbs and his wife:

*"Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you? ... I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks.*

*I was afraid we'd run out ... and eat our meals in silence, that's a fact. – Well, you and I have been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.*

When we think of our best friend, being with the one we love above all things, our attitude toward time changes. Time just slips from our thoughts, ... and the fear that Dr. Gibbs remembered, just makes us smile.



What will heaven really be like? I don't know.

But I do know that the Gospels are full of stories when Jesus shared meals and wine with his friends, or when he travelled the roads with them passing the miles in good conversation, or when he invited them to come away with him and rest.

If you are having trouble with the notion of eternal life, lay aside all notions of time, and think of those you love and think of heaven.

Jesus said, "***I am the bread of life.***"

It is an invitation from the Son to share in the life of the Trinity.  
It is the *unknown thing* we desire.  
It is grace.