

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, B – August 5, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Masses – 600 words

The people of Israel had been grumbling against God and Moses – and yet, God still rained down the bread from heaven that they needed, the food that they sought. In the gospel, the Jews seek out Jesus, effectively demanding food from him also; and he promises them true food: the bread of life, his own Body and Blood. In these scenes we see how, in spite of ingratitude and entitlement, the Lord God still provides for his people! This really highlights his great goodness – and our great unworthiness. It might give us pause, as we reflect upon how richly the Lord has provided for us and given us what we needed throughout our lives, in spite of our own failure to live up to his gift. And just imagine how great his provision would be if we sought it with thankfulness and humility!

Indeed, gratitude and humility are two hallmarks of the Holy Eucharist. We recall, first of all, that the word “eucharist” means “thanksgiving”. The prayers of the Mass highlight this by repeatedly thanking the Father for his saving action in Christ, who sacrifices himself to rescue us from sin and death – and makes that sacrifice present anew on our altar. The Catechism thus teaches us that the “Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification.”<sup>1</sup> When we come to Mass, do we do so with thanksgiving? Do we recall everything – the good and the bad – of the past week, and, placing it spiritually upon the altar, offer it to God with thanks?

The Eucharist also invites us to humility. See how humble God shows himself to be in how he provides for us: he is the almighty, the all-powerful, the all-knowing, the infinite, who yet wills to be contained, as it were, in a tiny host and come to us in the quietness and simplicity of Holy Communion. The sentiment constantly expressed throughout the Scriptures is that no man may see God and live:<sup>2</sup> if we saw him here on this earth in all his glory, we simply could not handle it; we would literally die! So he comes down to our level; he makes himself smaller than us; and he does so to provide us with the remedy of his life and grace – the only antidote to our mortal ills. And this follows from the humility of Christ’s own life and sacrifice: the eternal God entered into time, humbling himself, sharing in our condition, and dying on a cross to save us.

“You had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!”, the people grumbled against Moses – and against God. “Sir, give us this bread always”, the people insistently demanded of the Lord Jesus. How patient he is with us, who often have a similar lack of gratitude and a similar sense of entitlement! The words of St. Paul in our second reading today apply very urgently to us all: “you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way, in righteousness and holiness of truth.” As we kneel before the Lord’s sacrifice this day, may he open our eyes to how richly he provides for all our needs – and make us more eager to merit the gifts he gives, in thankfulness of heart and humility of spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1360.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Exodus 33:20 and Judges 13:22.