

## THE BREAD WE EAT

Isaiah 55. 1-5

Romans 9. 1-5

Matthew 14. 13-21

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

As history has shown, people will riot if they can't get enough daily bread to live.

On the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1789 in Paris, a young woman struck a marching drum in front of a group of market-women in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine who were infuriated by the chronic shortage and high price of bread in France. From their starting point in the markets of the eastern section of Paris, the angry women forced a nearby church to toll its bells. Their numbers continued to grow; and with restless energy the group began to march. More women from other nearby marketplaces joined in, many bearing kitchen blades and other makeshift weapons, as the bells rang from church towers throughout several districts of the city. Driven by a variety of agitators, the mob converged on the City Hall of Paris, where they demanded not only bread, but arms. As more and more women and men arrived, the crowd outside the City Hall numbered between six and seven thousand people. In unison, the group began to roar, 'To Versailles'; and they set out on foot. As they passed the Place de Grève in Paris, they were joined by fifteen thousand National Guardsmen and several thousand more civilian latecomers.

Whether she had planned it or not, the young woman who struck a marching drum at that Paris open-air market succeeded in mobilising no less than twenty-four thousand people, all of them ready to riot and ready to do anything to ensure that bread in France would be once again plentiful and cheap. What is now called the 'Women's March on Versailles' was one of the earliest and most significant events of

the French Revolution. It is but one example of the many food riots that are recorded in history.

Many centuries before the French Revolution, our Lord finds himself surrounded by another significant crowd. This crowd has no intention of rioting, however. People have come from all of the towns surrounding the Sea of Galilee, and they have followed Jesus on foot. Christ, seeing their number, has compassion on them and cures those who are sick. There must have been many who needed his healing touch, because his ministry amongst them occupied everyone right up to the hour of the evening meal. There the crowds were, on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee. It is a deserted place; it is Gentile territory; and there is no food. Five thousand people are destitute and hungry; and our Lord takes five loaves and two fish, blesses and breaks the loaves, and gives the food to the disciples to distribute to them. 'All ate and were filled'. No-one went away hungry.

We live as hungry people in a hungry world. Everyone is looking for something that will sustain and nourish life, something that will feed and energise, something that will fill and satisfy. Everyone is looking for bread. The problem is not that we are hungry, but the kind of bread we eat.

Think about the varieties of bread being eaten in our lives and in the world today. Some countries are eating the bread of violence and war. Some political groups are eating the bread of negativity, hostility and name-calling. Many of us eat the bread of having to be right and get our way. We eat the bread of hurt feelings and resentment. Or we eat the bread of sorrow or guilt. Sometimes we eat the bread of power and control; and at other times we eat the bread of revenge or one-upmanship. We eat all kinds of bread. The bread that we eat reveals something about the nature of our appetites.

The world is full of bread; and yet far too many people live hungry, empty and searching. That says something about our appetites and the bread we have eaten. It's a sure sign that the bread we have eaten cannot give real life. It is perishable bread that nourishes only a perishable life. It leaves us wanting only more of the same.

Not all bread sustains and grows life. Not all bread is nutritious. If you want to know the nutritional value of the bread, you have to look beyond the bread. Where did it come from? What are its ingredients?

The feeding of the five thousand is a miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels of the Bible. After the miracle, St John tells us that the crowds who had been so magnificently fed got into boats, crossed the Sea of Galilee and went looking for Christ in Capernaum. When they find him, they do not marvel at yesterday's miracle, give thanks for God's generosity, or even wonder who has accomplished this great work. They see no sign, no miracle, in yesterday's feeding. They see nothing more than fish and bread. They are interested only in their own appetites and our Lord knows it.

He says to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.' The people are concerned for their bellies; but Jesus is concerned for their lives. The people want to feed themselves with bread, Christ wants to feed them with God. 'Do not work for the food that perishes,' he tells them, 'but for the food that endures for eternal life.'

The food that endures is our Lord himself. He is the bread that is broken and distributed for the life of the world. He is the bread that is broken and yet never divided. He is the bread that is eaten and yet never exhausted. He is the bread that consecrates those who believe in him and eat him.

When we believe in Jesus, eating, ingesting and taking him into our lives, we live differently. We see ourselves and one another as persons created in the image and likeness of God rather than as obstacles or issues to be overcome. We trust the silence of prayer rather than the words of argument. We choose love and forgiveness rather than anger and retribution. We relate with intimacy and vulnerability rather than superficiality and defensiveness. We listen for God's voice rather than our own. Ultimately, we seek life rather than death.

'I am the bread of life,' Christ tells the people. 'Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' He offers himself to the people. He is the imperishable bread that nourishes and sustains imperishable life.

Our Lord makes the same offer to us. He offers himself to us in every one of our relationships: family, friends, strangers, enemies, those who agree with us and those who disagree. In every situation and each day of our life, we choose the bread we will eat, perishable or imperishable. In so doing we also choose the life that we want.

I wonder, what bread will we eat today?

Amen.