

Trusting in God

a sermon preached on the

9th Sunday after Pentecost

2 August 2009

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by Fr Jim McKenna
associate priest at St Luke's
& chaplain to Bishopspark

Lecton: John 6: 24-35; Exodus 16: 12-4, 9-15

The reading from Exodus tells us how God fed the Israelites in the desert with manna.

Jesus also fed people who were hungry, but the gospel reading from John makes it clear that Jesus did not come to live amongst us to merely satisfy physical hunger. The manna was a foreshadowing of the spiritual food which was being offered by Jesus and his disciples.

In 1885 Vincent van Gogh visited a museum in Amsterdam to see Rembrandt's famous painting "The Jewish Bride." Having seen it he said, "I would give ten years of my life if I could sit before this picture for a fortnight with nothing but a crust of bread for food." Van Gogh went on to say, "My first hunger is not for food. My desire for painting is much stronger!" Painting was his 'be all and end all' - and his hunger.

Not all of our hungers should be satisfied. Some of them are appetites which could destroy us if we feed them. The more they are fed, the hungrier and more demanding they become, and we become addicted. We should be aware that such appetites exist within us.

We hunger for a feeling of importance. No one wants to be nobody. We all want to matter, if only to one person. We hunger for acceptance. If we feel we are not accepted it becomes almost impossible for us to realise ourselves.

We hunger for motivation. Without it we have no drive. We hunger for relationships. Without them we are at the mercy of anguish and loneliness. We hunger for faith, a set of positive beliefs to guide us. We hunger for hope, to give up is like going on a spiritual hunger strike. We hunger for love. Love comes to us in many ways and if this hunger was fully satisfied, there is a good chance that most of our other hungers would disappear.

However, there is one other hunger, a deeper one, and one that underlies all other hungers, including that of love. It is the hunger for eternal life. It is the hunger for God in our lives.

The feeding of the people in the desert with manna, is regarded as a classic example of God's care for his people, yet the manna probably was a natural phenomenon; but this doesn't mean it was not a gift from God. It may have been a sweet resinous food, which drips from a certain desert tree and hardens in the cool of the night. It has to be collected early in the morning before it melts in the heat of the day.

God said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the heavens each day. The people are to go out and gather the day's portion. I propose to test them this way, to see whether they will follow me or not."

If you ask a Christian if they believe that God is the only God, they will answer without hesitation, "of course!" But if you ask them if they trust God to see to it that they have all that they need – they may hesitate and possibly say – "Well, I haven't reached that stage yet."

The desert experience was an opportunity for the Israelites to rely on God, to trust in providence on a daily basis. They must collect only what they needed for that day. God would provide for them the next day.

Jesus taught the same message. He said we should pray – “Give us today our daily bread.” this will sound strange, and even foolish, to those who put their complete trust in insurance policies and stocks and shares. (How often have we seen them crash?) They don’t leave much room for God.

It wasn’t the manna that sustained the Israelites in the desert, it was their faith and trust in God. The same food is available to us today. It is not we who keep the faith – it is the faith that keeps us.

Amen

Reference: Flor McCarthy, SDB

j.p.mckenna@xtra.co.nz