

# 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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In the Lord's Prayer, we ask for our daily bread. The Israelites in the desert were given fresh food each day, quails in the evening, manna in the morning. They were given just enough to feed them that day, not enough to keep any back for tomorrow. The only exception was Friday, when they were given enough to keep them going through the Sabbath without having to work on the Sabbath day. When Jesus fed the 5000 he gave them enough to eat, and the scraps were collected up, but he did not send them home with 'doggy bags'. Jesus does not want us to wonder at the sign without understanding the reality to which it points. Our Lord wants to meet not just the needs of the body but our deepest needs. He comes to give us spiritual food, food that will endure to eternal life.

Our bodies are not designed like that of the camel, to go without food or water for extended periods, or like dormice, and other animals that hibernate. God has designed us in such a way that we need to eat and drink in moderate proportions each day. This means we are more dependent on the environment, and on each other for the food we need. In this way, we also learn to depend each day on the goodness of God, without whom we would not be alive at all. In his reply to Moses, God implies that, if they are given too much independence, they will wander off in the wrong direction, and come to harm.

We are baptised only once, and that lasts us a lifetime. Why do we need to receive Holy Communion more than once in a lifetime? Baptism is symbol of death and rebirth, once in a lifetime events. In the Eucharist Our Lord deliberately chose signs of food and drink, things that, in themselves, last only a short time. They nourish us, and become part of us, but tomorrow we need food and drink again. When Jesus says, "He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst", this is not because we receive a once and for all dose, like immunisation against a disease. He means that as long as we depend on him, like the Israelites in the desert, we will be given each day the graces and spiritual strength we need.

This is why our Sunday Mass and Holy Communion are so important for us. When the Church says we must go to Mass every Sunday and holy day, she is not imposing a burden on us, but reminding us of the need for a healthy spiritual diet. We acknowledge our dependence on God, and our need for the food he provides. If you are not able to come to Mass for an extended period for health reasons, the priest will be delighted to make arrangements for you to receive Holy Communion at home.

Those who cannot receive Communion for some reason can still make what the Church calls a 'spiritual communion'. This means to tell Our Lord how much we long to receive him. St Alphonsus, whose feast day fell on Wednesday, composed the following prayer, although we can use our own words: *"My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You have already come, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen."* God's hands are not tied and he can give us his grace in a non-sacramental way if we ask him. However, if we go without by our own choice, we are like people suffering from anorexia, who convince themselves that going without food is the way to be healthy, while others can see them fading away.

The Eucharist is the Bread of life. Through it God our Father provides us with the strength we need to lead a truly Christian life.