

The Bread of Life  
August 1, 2021, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Gospel of John 6:24-35  
Fr. John

There is a line in the poem 'IF' by Rudyard Kipling that reads: 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, And treat those two imposters just the same...' Treating those two imposters just the same reminded me that there is indeed a disaster in every triumph and a triumph in every disaster insofar as there is a price to be paid with every success and a valuable lesson to be learned with every loss or failure.

What has that got to do with the readings for the liturgy this Sunday which seem to focus on food - manna and quail in the reading from Exodus and the 'bread from heaven' Jesus speaks of in the gospel of John?

Perhaps if we take a little closer look at the natural elements of bread and wine chosen by Christ by which we celebrate his Eucharistic presence and recall how they are produced - it may give us a deeper insight into how God often uses seeming contradictions to teach us how the ambiguities of life display divine wisdom.

Kernels of wheat have to be crushed, and give up their individuality to become something communal - ie - flour - which when water is added, has to endure fire to be baked into bread. Likewise, wine is produced when individual grapes are crushed to form a liquid which requires time and patience in the fermentation process to produce a festive drink.

The point being - the surrendering of individuality for a common greater good plus the endurance, time, and patience required in the production of bread and wine are also the same qualities which the Eucharist calls out in us as well.

The goodness and joys of life as well as the pains and shortcomings of that same life are indeed the triumphs and disasters that we must treat the same.

We live in a world of tension and ambiguity. In North America, we waste much of the food that we produce while a mother in South Sudan, Africa must bury her children who die of starvation. In our own country, we take clean drinking water for granted while many of our Indigenous communities have to boil theirs to make it drinkable.

How would we explain such a contradiction to someone visiting our planet from another world?

I say this, not to lay a guilt trip on those of us who are fortunate enough to reap the benefits of living in a wealthy country, but to be reminded that our material wealth is often built on the backs of those who have made sacrifices on our behalf. The very elements that compose the bread and wine we consume sacramentally are themselves a testament of the price paid on our behalf and we should be mindful of that each time we receive the Eucharist.

The people asked Jesus: 'What sign are you going to give us so that we may see it and believe in you? What work are you performing?'

Jesus might have asked them [and us] the same question. Indeed, what signs and works **are** we giving that others may have a sense of hope despite all the ambiguities and seeming contradictions which they encounter in life?

So when we receive the Eucharist, we are not receiving it as some kind of reward for obeying the 10 Commandments or abiding by Church rules but rather as a commissioning to do what Christ did and carrying out his mission in the world. This **is** the Bread of Life which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. That Bread, which brings life and death, triumph and disaster into focus, is a reminder that we must treat both of them as opportunities to grow in the knowledge and the love of God our Creator.

Hopefully, we can be graced to also say: 'Give us this bread always.'