

Food that Endures

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

John 6:24-35

Nowadays, people are more conscious about being fit and healthy. That's one of the reasons why we are seeing people being more mindful about the things they eat. You have probably heard the saying, "You are what you eat." The idea is that being healthy is closely related to having a sound diet, eating good and nutritious food.

Dieting has become super important in our times. People follow different regimens. However, I have learned that it's all up to the interpretation of the individual.

- I have seen several folks following the "HOPE" diet. People eat anything and everything and HOPE to lose weight.
- My brother has a unique understanding of what it means to have a balanced diet. As I understand it, a balanced diet is about eating certain amounts of carbs, proteins and so forth each day. But for some individuals, a balanced diet is about having a plate full of food on each hand, so they don't lose balance.
- I have to confess. At this moment, I am following the "seafood" diet. It's a very simple, pain-free dietary regimen. It's as simple as you "see food" and you eat it.

Let's get to serious matters. The reason I am talking about food and diet is because the biblical passages we read this morning are about food. In the reading from the book of Exodus, we learned how the people grumbled against Moses because they were hungry. The Israelites were in a bad mood because they didn't have anything to eat. But God was attentive to their cry. The Lord heard the complain of the Hebrew people and provided manna for the mornings and meat for the evenings.

Actually, you did not hear the word manna in the reading this morning. Here is what happened. The first morning the Israelites saw the thin-frosted flakes on the sandy ground of the desert, they picked them up and wondered, "*Manna?*", which means, "What is this?".

When we go to the gospel, we learn that John chapter 6 begins by telling the story of Jesus feeding a great multitude, a crowd of more than five thousand people. As the chapter develops, we see that food continues to be the central topic of this narrative.

We read that people were intensely looking for Jesus. There was a large crowd that traveled from Capernaum to the other side looking for the Lord. It sounds like these people really wanted to have an encounter with Jesus. But, the motives fueling their desires were questionable.

From the very words of Jesus, we learn that the people were looking for a secure food supply. The people were not seeking Jesus to find enjoyment and delight in the Lord's company. The ultimate purpose of the people was to have a free lunch and Jesus was just a means for them to achieve their goal.

But Jesus could see through the real intentions of the people. And, with great boldness the Lord said to them, “[I know] you are looking for me, ... because you ate the loaves and had your fill... [Please] Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures...” (John 6:26-27 NIV).

Work for food that endures...

I find Jesus’s words to be extremely relevant for a time such as ours. Still today, people are looking for ways to satisfy their needs. I am talking about our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Sometimes, we try to find fulfillment by chasing after things that provide some degree of gratification, at least momentarily.

I don’t think that looking for ways to meet our temporal needs is a problem. Just a day before Jesus told the crowd “work for the food that endures”, the Lord provided food to these same people, the kind of food that spoils, and he did so abundantly. So, the problem was not that the people needed and wanted food. The problem was that they only had a passion for filling the stomach and did not care about filling the soul. Or, worse still, the people were trying to fill a void much deeper in their lives with temporary stuff, in this case by binge-eating.

We know it happens all the time. People try to find meaning and purpose by chasing after “success,” money and status. People try to quench the void that only God can fill up with pleasure, approval-seeking, achievements, a false sense of superiority, and even pedantic control and manipulation. The people that came to Jesus were dealing with issues very similar to the ones we deal with today. They needed God as much as we do. And, the ways they tried to meet their needs, at times, parallels the ways we find ourselves trying to meet ours.

So, when Jesus told the crowd, “work for the food that endures”, the Lord was calling them to realize that their actions were not going to bring the results they were longing for deep within. That’s why along with the invitation to work for the food that endures, Jesus told the people to engage in the work of God, which is believing in Jesus himself.

You have to love the reply of the people in regard to Jesus’ statement. Without beating too much around the bush, they said to Jesus, “Well, give us a sign to believe in you.” We have to put this in context. Just a day before, Jesus had performed many signs, including the sign of supernaturally feeding these same folks. Yet, the people were still asking for more signs and they had a specific request. They said to Jesus:

“Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat (v. 31).’ In other words, give us some fresh bread... take us out to dinner... and we will believe in you.” The people’s request was a very convenient, self-serving request; wasn’t it?

That was the problem of the multitude: getting to know Jesus, believing in Jesus, was not their real purpose. Jesus was a means for them to find some degree of pleasure. They treated Jesus as a means to an end not an end in itself. That’s how false gods are created... We make the means the

ultimate purpose, and we make the ultimate purpose the means. We pay more attention to the gift than the Giver.

The people came to Jesus for the food that spoils. Their attention was so fixated in consuming, that all their senses were consumed in their attempt of getting a free meal. That's what happens when we try to find meaning away from God. Our lives get consumed in our meaning-seeking, meaning-making attempts to the point that we cannot see beyond our predilections.

The vision of the people was dimmed by their own self-seeking ways. For that reason, they missed the opportunity of receiving the Bread of Life. That day, the people missed the opportunity of receiving the One who can truly satisfy our deepest hunger and our truest needs, Jesus Christ.

Today, the Lord is speaking to us with the same words: "work for the food that endures." These words lead us to question our actions. How are we going about finding fulfillment in our lives? Is God our everlasting portion? Or, do we want God just to give us our portion of whatever we want or think we need? Are we treating God as a means to end? Or, is knowing Christ—the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings—our ultimate goal? Is knowing Christ the priority of my life and everything else serves that purpose? Or, am I taming God to conform to my preferences and worldviews?

As you ponder on these questions, I want you to keep in mind the words of Jesus who said, "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*" (**John 6:35 NIV**). Work for the food that endures! Seek to know, embrace and surrender to Jesus. In God, you will find real meaning in life. As you focus on Jesus, all false gods will vanish. You will learn how to be completely satisfied in the Lord. You will be made whole.