

St Pius-St Anthony 18th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B

What do they say about no bad questions? Only bad one is the one unasked? Or the one I ask? But I love questions and there is a neat progression pattern to the crowd's questions of 'two steps forward, one step back' today. Two pass with flying colors, yet the third one causes Jesus to stop and push back (challenging their motives/desires). For example, **first** they ask "“Rabbi, when did you get here?” (John 6:25). Good! They want to follow Jesus; they are seeking Him. We all should! Every day we should call out and seeking & looking for Jesus. Then **secondly**, they ask “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” (John 6:28) Good again. They ask how they can help God's cause, do God's will. They want to serve God, and are looking for ways to be with God, furthering the good spread of grace on earth. But then comes that **third** question, that acts like a turnoff, and Jesus pushes back against it, as they ask, “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? **What can you do?**” (John 6:30). I imagine Jesus' reaction is something like ‘Oh, is that what you are after? ‘What is in it for you?’ They have gone from good curious, (Where are you-we are looking for you) to good helpful (What can we do to help?) to then falling down selfish with ‘What am I going to get out of this?’ They are saying with that third question, ‘What tricks can you perform? What can you do to entertain us?’ Here they are mistaking Jesus for a sideshow or for a free lunch. At this point, Jesus invites them to consider that they may be looking for the wrong things in him. He suggests that they may only be coming to him for another stomach filling. He said, “Are you looking for me because you ate your fill last time, and not for spiritual things?” (John 6:26) Maybe they are like homeless cats that once you feed they will come back, but only because of the food (you want to ask those cats, please help out- for sure get rid of mice around here- & snakes). So, Jesus is pushing them to realize that he is about much more than just another great meal-multiplying food. They are maybe just clingers-on, asking for another trick (notice in their reaction they present like a ‘competing offer of past benefits-‘Look what Moses did for ancestors-how can you top Him’) But instead of sitting back to be entertained, they need to sit up, instead of looking only at what they get out of Jesus they may need to ask themselves, “What am I bringing to him?” We can be tempted to fall into this thinking pattern. Or for sure, how many parents are faced with this every week getting ready for church, they tend to hear from kids a lot, “I don't want to go; I don't get anything out of mass”. But hey, Jesus has to ask us, “What are we bringing to it?” If someone told

me they were bored about baseball playoffs game, saying, “I went to the first game but I didn’t get anything out of it.” I’d have to ask, “But did you review the starting line up first-familiarize yourself with players’ names & stats, maybe buy a program? Did you get there early to find good seat-view, maybe walk down listen in around the dugout- sometimes you can catch an autograph, or did you watch warm-ups (who is in bullpen-or out swinging, or walking the outer fence)?” Yes, even for a spectator what makes for a great game; the difference is one’s own engagement (what each person brings to it.)

So, Jesus’ great thought for the day, is his saying, “Do not work for ***food that perishes*** but for the food that endures for eternal life” (John 6:27). ***‘Food that perishes’***. What a wonderful phrase. That is the stuff of this world that will never truly fulfill us- no matter how fine it looks, or how much of it we accumulate. Jesus reminds us that most of what we consume in this life (if it is not Him) is only like drinking salt water, thinking it is satisfying our thirst; or sitting down with a teeming plate of cotton candy. We can take it all in and guess what, you are hungrier/thirstier afterward than you were before. That is the *food of this world*-food that perishes (promises but does not deliver); but Jesus is different. If we receive Him, we will be satisfied. He alone can fill the emptiness this world leaves us with. Maybe you have heard St Augustine’s popular statement from his spiritual autobiography, “*Lord, our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*” (And St Augustine had tasted much (if not all) of this world’s offerings of pleasures.) So, until we have received the enduring nourishment of Jesus, we are restlessly, futilely trying to be nourished with ‘food that perishes’. His phrase makes me think of times, that I tried to relish food, or save food for later enjoyment when it only spoiled on me. It happens a lot to me that out at a dinner, I may eat around the plate, saving the final bite of the best item-entrée to enjoy last, and I get animated about telling a story (might that happen?), and a good server will slip in and remove the plate, being most helpful, and there it goes-gone, not enjoyed! Maybe similar things have happened to you? Have you ever trying saving food, that spoiled out on you. I had a dear friend once that had won the highest bid at a charity auction for a local woman’s famous homemade cake. So she got the cake, and set up a little luncheon for some of us to come visit and of course, have the cake/coffee afterward. Well, it was a massive multi-layer homemade cake (Hummingbird cake I think it was called it was so dense & filled with fruit-nuts-lot of moisture, and rather than refrigerate it (as it called for) she had stored it under her cake plate displayed on the counter that week. So sure enough, as we settled into coffee & cake time

after lunch, the first bites were strong tastes-memorable. But not sweet-fruity, but they were pungent & moldy, yikes! (All for a good cause) But that was like this 'food that perishes' Jesus is talking about. "Spoiling Food-Perishing food", Jesus uses that metaphor of transitory things in this life that promise satisfaction but always come up short. They just don't last. If our hearts are fully set upon any of these finite things in this world, then we are setting up our frustration /let down, as all things here will decay, breakdown, fall apart. So, Jesus summarizes his 'bread of life' talk today, by saying of Himself, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me **will never hunger**, and whoever believes in me **will never thirst**" (Jn 6:35) Receiving Jesus (we say, here in this Holy Eucharist that feeds our souls with what is needed. The only satisfying food) should be our response, like the crowd's response in gospel, "Give us this food always!"