

[Readings: Ex. 16:2-4, 12-15; Ps. 69; Eph. 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35]

We live in a 24-hour society. Life never stops. Someone is always up and doing something. And it is never dark. Our cities light up the night. But it starts getting darker as we get older. We get afflicted with night blindness and find it hard to drive at night. It seems as though there is darkness inside now that intensifies the darkness outside. Being “in the dark” can happen in broad daylight. Certainly the people talking to Jesus today are in the dark. They have not only seen the miracle of the loaves but also have been fed by that miracle. Yet they do not see the signs, says Jesus. Well, the signs are right there in front of them: the miracle itself.

It is hard to explain such blindness, but not at all hard to prove its existence. Moses is faced with it again and again in the desert. The escapees from Egypt see marvelous things in the desert – the cloud of fire, the smoke on Mount Sinai, the water from the rock, and yes, their very freedom from slavery. Yet they do not sense the presence of God among them, caring for them. And so they complain, and about what? Food, of course! So God gives them manna. After the dew evaporates in the morning, something like coriander seed, from the carrot family, appears. So, in a sense, God gives them “carrot cake” for breakfast! And still they complain about “this wretched food.” So God, aware of the laws of nature, guides the quail returning from their spring migration to Europe exhausted on the desert sands. Easily scooped up, they provide ready food for the traveler. The word “manna” comes from the Hebrew question, “What is this?” What is this, indeed that God provides for the people day in and day out? Today’s responsorial psalm says that God “rained manna upon them for food and gave them heavenly bread.” Think of that at Communion time when you return to your pew. You have just received the Bread of Angels. The Bread from Heaven.

And think of what we are going to do while you are still wherever you are, before you head for church. Imagine the anticipation of coming to meet Jesus, the Bread of Life. Do you remember the anticipation of your wedding day? Your First Communion? Your Confirmation? Your first live or rock concert? Such excitement. Reminds me of the back-to-school TV commercial with the kids jumping up and down about buying school supplies and going to the dentist. Who DOES that?

We do that before coming to church. We look at what we are going to wear. Do our clothes say, we are going to meet Jesus? Are they the best clothes we can wear to church? Our "Sunday Best." Are they modest enough so that when we sit, stand and kneel, we do not become a moment of temptation or scandal? Do we cover up those parts of the body that need to be covered up?

Do we look at the readings for Mass before coming to church, so that when we hear them, they are familiar to us? Older folks have this luxury in a quiet home to read and pray and meditate. But what about our younger families? I appreciate and I say Thank You to be able to get the kids dressed, organized and in the car ahead of time so you are not late for Mass. I know that it isn't easy, Sunday after Sunday. So thank you. Maybe in the chaos of the ride to and from church, you can prepare the younger children by explaining what is going to happen at Mass, in church.

Three parishes ago, a parent told me about one particular ride to church. Their fifth grader asked his parents, "Do you know when the bread and wine at Mass becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus? The TRANSUBSTANTIATION! The parents were impressed with such a big word which their son learned in his catechism class. And with that distraction, they almost got into an accident!

Make a little game about noticing certain actions and certain words. Talk about the homily on the way home. Bring a little note pad and a pen to take notes during the homily. Thank you for being attentive in your preparation for Mass.

When we get to the parish grounds, do we park sensibly in the parking lot? Do we allow room for emergency vehicles to be able make it down the lane? Do we avoid parking near the sidewalks and the areas marked with yellow lines? This is not only a problem here but in every parish.

Do we assist the elderly and the handicapped as they enter the church? Do we keep our voices low before Mass and after Mass as a sign of respect to those who are praying before Mass begins? Do we genuflect at the tabernacle or at least bow before we enter the pew?

I was very conscientious about doing this when I was in high school. In fact, it had become such a habit with me that when I was out on a date, before I entered the seminary, I took my non-Catholic date to a movie theatre. As we got to our row of

seats, I let her enter first, then before I did, I genuflected! At the movie theater! Once I was seated, she looked at me and asked, "Catholic, huh?"

Do we slide down the pew, so that all those who need, can sit at the ends of the pew? Do we keep our feet off the kneelers and avoid marks on the pews? Do we leave the area cleaner than we found it, removing all used tissue, bulletins and garbage? Do we place the hymnals back properly? Do we settle ourselves down before Mass begins, closing our eyes in wonder and anticipation at what will happen in Word and Sacrament?

God once again feeds the people of Israel. Ironically, the name "Israel" can be translated as "the people who contended and fought with God." They are aptly named. And for being so stiff-necked and complaining, God allows them to wander in the desert for forty years. Why forty years? Because this insures that everyone from the original refugees from Egypt would die or would eventually die in the desert. Maybe the next generation of Israelites will be more faithful and trusting in the Lord.

Thankfully, Jesus Christ does not let us wander aimlessly in the worldly darkness. The bread, the miraculous bread that He gives to the crowds and that He gives to us, is the sign that we all want, that we all need, to see that He is here with us, and that we need to prevent the inner darkness from matching and melding with the darkness outside. This celebration keeps our eyes open and clear so that we can always be sure of the road to the Kingdom of God.

"Sir, give us the bread always!" AMEN!