

[Readings: Ex. 16:2-4, 12-15; Ps. 78; 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, not at all hard to prove.

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. In a sense, God gives them “carrot cake!” And still they complain about “this wretched food.” Come to think of it, I haven’t had a good slice of carrot cake in years! 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. You have just eaten the Bread from Heaven.

Manna from heaven is what we’re all waiting for. But we keep looking up to the sky to find it, instead of in the body of Christ, namely our sisters and brothers.

In what ways do you hunger and thirst? How can others, through God’s ways of holiness and truth, fulfill your needs? How can you fulfill the needs of others?

Jesus tells us that the work of God is to believe in the one he sent. How strong is your belief in Jesus? What could strengthen your faith?

Think about a time when you felt really famished -- your stomach growling and your head light. Imagine living a lifetime with that level of hunger. Pray for those whose hunger is not satisfied, and then do something to help feed them. Imagine a spiritual hunger at that same level of intensity. Perhaps those hungry souls are part of our parish or in the priestly community. Pray for ourselves and them to find fulfillment in Jesus.

Mark Twain once wrote, "I have known many troubles in my life, most of which never happened." I know about such troubles, too. These are the troubles looming just out in the future that occupy my mind in unguarded moments throughout the day or especially as I try to drift off to sleep. I can worry about world problems a little and local problems even more. But the problems that keep me up the most are parish and family problems. Or at least I portray them as problems in my mind.

I have worried about roofs leaking and basements flooding and paint peeling and rightly so. Remember the historic floods of four years ago? And now, due to roof and shingle damage, we now have black mold in certain parts of the rectory. Saint Paul warns the Ephesians in our Second Reading, "You must no longer live in the futility of your mind." He wants them to "put away the old self" and "be renewed in the spirit of your minds." So does the Archbishop of Detroit, Allen Vigneron.

It has been almost two years since the Archdiocesan Synod 2016 and over one year since the publication of the Archbishop's Pastoral Letter: "Unleash the Gospel." In the letter, he gives an introduction, lays down foundational convictions, gives a catechetical exposition, provides guideposts for a solution and then offers a conclusion.

In other words, Archbishop Vigneron identifies what the people of Synod 16 see as the strengths of the Catholics in our Archdiocese, our weaknesses, and how we can move as "joyful missionary disciples" from a Church focused on maintenance to one of mission.

To that end, we will be having a two-part presentation on "Unleash the Gospel" here at St. Martin de Porres Parish on Monday, August 20th and Monday, August 27th,

both starting at 7:00 PM in the parish hall. I would like to invite all of you to come to this workshop. It will be similar to the Parish Dialogue Session we had back in 2015.

In anticipation of that workshop, I ask those who are planning on attending to pick up a copy of the pastoral letter after Mass and sign up for the two evenings. We only have a limited number of copies of the letter, so please take one only if you are planning on attending one or both of the sessions. Read it in anticipation of the session. A warning: the first third of the letter is heavy in theology that even baffles me! But the next two parts are much easier to read and to digest!

I especially invite our Parish Pastoral Council, our Parish Finance Council, all of our Commissions, and all those involved in our parish activity. You won't be disappointed, and your input will help St. Martin's as we move into the future.

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.

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 at this Mass, 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 this bread always!" AMEN!