

## St Pius & St Anthony 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

Jesus says, “Do not work for **food that perishes** but for **food that endures** for eternal life” (John 6:27) So there is a ‘perishing’ food, and an ‘enduring’ food. We may guess, is their difference something like ‘good carbs’ and ‘bad carbs’, where good carbs are the food that endures, lasts and sticks with you, and bad carbs are the ‘perishing’ ones (processed white flour) that spike your sugar and then crash you flat in 15 minutes. Maybe something like that! I hear Jesus saying He wants us to desire & work for a truly satisfying food that feeds all of our being, not just our bodies, but our hearts and souls. We often talk about homey, hearty food that sticks to our ribs, well, I think Jesus is talking here about a ‘soul food’ that sticks to our hearts. It stays with us, lasting and truly quenches our hungers. I find Jesus’ teaching here very similar to what He says in the Sermon on Mount in Matthew 6:19-20, counseling us “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But **store up treasures in heaven.**” Jesus wants us to be after what lasts, what remains with us, what really goes the eternal distance-food that goes on and on feeding us, and treasure that can’t be touched, rot or taken from us.

When the crowds mob around Him after that miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes last week, Jesus challenges them to ask themselves, “Are they only coming to Him for another ‘free meal’ for their stomachs?” (Jn 6:26) or because they “**see the sign**” (that He is true bread Himself to feed us) that He is more than anything this world can offer and all we need is Him. He is the eternally energizing food that our hearts cry for to be satisfied. Jesus points out that stomachs will naturally empty, and then what do we have? Back to being hungry, tired and longing all over again. Jesus’ conversation here in John 6, is also eerily similar to what Jesus tells the Woman at the Well in John 4. She was tired of going back to the same well over and over again, to get buckets of water to drink— Jesus says to her, “Whoever drinks the water I shall give will **never thirst**; the water I shall give, will become in that person a spring of water welling up within them....” (Jn 4:14). An internal, truly satisfying source that we should all be after! That life-giving water, that is Jesus, is just like the ‘living, lifegiving’ bread that Jesus talks about here. He alone provides what truly satisfies our souls.

We will be focusing on John chapter 6 and the ‘Living Bread’ that is Jesus for these next four weeks (what is called the Bread of Life Discourses in John-it is Eucharistic Teaching). As a starter here, to just begin breaking open this loaf of the ‘Living Bread’ of Jesus a little, I like to emphasize that Jesus tells us “whoever eats this bread inherits **eternal life**’ (Jn 6:58). What is ‘eternal life’? There are two

dimensions to eternal life, (1-forever and 2-now!) We can think of eternity as a continuum of time stretched over a long view of life as repeating duration of moments. But the phrase 'eternal life' can also mean 'abundant life right now', as when Jesus tells us in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life, **abundantly!**" That is life to the fullest! Eternity in Time! Imagine it as the fullness (most satisfying) of life's experience compressed into this moment now, right here-The Eternal present in time. a 'full-filled' moment here and now. So this experience of eternal life, is not something postponed until we get there some later day. No, God can give to us **now** something of it (*'Kingdom of God is among you' Lk 17:21*) *That is the 'Bread of Eternal Life' That Jesus gives (the living water that is Him).* *Jesus truly satisfies and fulfills our souls here and now, as nothing in this world can*

Our human experience confirms this all the time. Even when our creature comforts are met, don't we all still feel the nudging of the Holy Spirit for that 'something more' in life. Well, that is our soul's longing for God. It is the space/spot within us made for God alone to dwell, and that nothing else can fill. St Augustine in his Book Confessions (Chp 1.1) famously describes it: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God." That is human nature. We think "If only I can get that 'next big thing' then I will be satisfied", whether that is the great vacation, the promotion at work, the upgrade on the game-computer, the 'in demand' gadget, toy or device. And what happens, but we get it, and not satisfied, we still hunger for the NEXT, next thing. This is what Jesus is talking about. When we try filling a God spot with something 'not God', we will always feel empty.

When I was in college, I ran across two books that confirmed this 'universal longing' we all have for the truly satisfying food for our souls: Jesus' living bread and living water. One of the books was Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, which he wrote about his firsthand experiences of the terrors of Death camp of Auschwitz. He studied and was interested in what gave some people the mental strength to survive and keep going through the ordeal to make it. He discovered that it was "Spiritual longing" that made the difference in surviving or not (the element of hope in one's heart and looking ahead to something more). He summarized it as, "the person who has a 'why to live' can bear through any 'how to live'". The other book was the psychoanalyst Carl Jung's work titled, 'Modern Man in Search of a Soul' where he reflected upon his lifetime's experience, conducting therapy with patients. He concluded that the overwhelming majority of people's life issues that brought them to therapy with him, were at the root, 'spiritual problems'! Both of these books confirm to us what Jesus is on to in the gospel reading today, by Him introducing us to the only satisfying and fulfilling bread for our souls -Himself. We need more than this world offers. Jesus started

early in His ministry bringing this 'longing in our hearts' to light for us. Way back when the devil offered Jesus worldly and tempting deceptions in Mathew 4:4, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 "***Man does not live on bread alone***", to push away the Devil who was playing to that human weakness of ours, that 'hunger in the human heart' that always wants more in the world. Well, life is about more than bread for our stomachs. Our souls desire the life-giving bread God provides, that is Jesus. Truly Satisfying, Only God can fill that space within us, that He made/set in us, "making us in God's image/likeness" (Gen 1:27). God alone, Jesus, fulfills that longing within us. It is the Bread that is Him, the Holy Eucharist we are blessed to receive in every Mass.