

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Apr 15th 2024

Believe in the Word – the bread of life

The author of the Gospel is not reporting an actual conversation between Jesus and the crowd. Today's passage is a theological reflection addressing matters of dispute between the Christian community and their Jewish contemporaries of his time.

Jesus had fed 5000 people with five loaves 'on the other side of the lake', and now he is back in Capernaum. The crowd who witnessed the miracle and ate the bread- now comes in search of him. Jesus understands their need. "You look for me... because you ate bread and were satisfied." This is the literary style of John. We see him using this writing technique while narrating the story of the Samaritan Woman, who tells Jesus: "Sir, give me this water so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

By telling the story of the crowd who runs for bread from Jesus, John points out to his community the shallowness of their faith. They believed in Jesus to obtain some favours... for a miraculous cure, success in business, enough food and a comfortable living. Even today, many believe in Jesus, hoping to obtain favours from the Lord and some miraculous healings or blessings. Jesus reminded the crowd and now reminds us - to ask ourselves of the motive of our practising religion.

John teaches such community members: "Work then, not for perishable food, but for the lasting food which gives eternal life" (vv. 26-27). It is love and sharing that produce bread in abundance.

Today, decoding the symbolisms of John, many scripture scholars would say, The five loaves are the five books of Moses – the Torah. And the two fish represented the books of the Prophets and the other scriptures of Israel to complement the Torah. Multiplying the five loaves and two fish implies that Jesus fed the multitude with the Word of God. We should also remember the words of Jesus: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God."

How do we nourish ourselves with this bread? "What must we do?"—the crowd in Capernaum asked Jesus. The answer is the last verse of today's Gospel:

Not many works, but only one, to believe in him – the Word of God - whom the Father sent. No other thing is required.

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