

The Best Smell in the World John 6:24-36

I don't know what smells you like, but some of my favorite smells was the smell of a freshly cut field of alfalfa, the smell that is there after a refreshing rain...but especially the smell of freshly baked bread. I wanted to have Kathi bake some bread during the services and have it wafting over us while we worshipped. I wonder if that smell would have driven us crazy or not...and then to have used that freshly baked bread for communion. Well, that's what Jesus wants to be in our lives. That our lives might take on the aroma of freshly baked bread by what we do or say in the name of Jesus.

A man owned a horse which he had trained to go if the rider said "Praise the Lord," and would stop only if he said "Amen." The man decided to sell that horse, but when he explained the peculiarities to a prospective buyer, the buyer said, "That's ridiculous. I've been raising horses all my life. I'll make him go my way." So he jumped on the horse and kicked him so that he started to run. The horse ran faster and faster. Worried, the buyer reined back and yelled "Whoa!" But the horse wouldn't stop. Suddenly the man realized they were racing toward the edge of a cliff. Desperately he yelled out, Amen! The horse screeched to a stop just in time. Peering over the edge of the cliff, the man wiped the perspiration from his brow. "Whew," he said, "Praise the Lord."

As we think of God, do we, like the buyer of the horse, try to, or do we truly understand that we are made in the image of God or do we try to make him into the image of ourselves.

In today's passage from the book of Exodus, we see the Jews rejecting the God who is. At that point they are like many people of all times who would rather have a God of their own making. During the years in the desert, when the Jews were coming to the promised land and God was giving them many signs of his special care, they complained of being hungry. So God allowed Manna to fall from heaven. The word manna means "What is it?"

Because manna resembled white corn, it was later described as bread of angels. God told them they were to collect enough for each day to satisfy their hunger for that day, and the day before the Sabbath they were permitted to collect twice as much in order that they could devote the Sabbath to God.

Many of the people, more self centered than God centered, went out to gather manna on the Sabbath, but that never worked out for them. And many complained that the manna was monotonous, they wanted it to taste differently from day to day. So God provided quail. This didn't satisfy them either. Frequently they longed for the pots of Egypt, even though their enslaved condition was extremely brutal. Complaints at the way God acts come down to our own time. Having a God in our own image is more comfortable than having ourselves in God's image, and makes God easier to handle, and we don't have to change.

Many of the Jews believed at the time of Jesus that he was telling them to keep the Torah. The Pharisees believed that the Torah was their bread from God. Although to us the Torah is simply the first five books of the Bible, to the Pharisees the Torah was the ultimate Word of God...His eternal self revelation, the place where one would find life. For them, from all eternity, the Torah was the model of creation which was to come. All things were created by God for the Torah, to fit in with the Torah, to find life through the Torah. The entire universe has as its model, purpose, goal, and cause, the Holy Torah.

The Pharisee believed the eternal Torah to have been delivered in the realm of time (about 1290 BC) to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The Pharisees distinguished 613 commandments in the written Torah, with additions from the oral Torah that were handed down authentically from Moses by the Scribes. These teachings were really their bread of life.

So they asked in our Gospel for today, what they should do of God that are in the Torah, in other words, "How can you make it easier for us to keep the hundreds of laws of the Torah.?"

Jesus answer was that, in contrast with all the "works" of the Torah, there's only one real work of God: to have faith in God as he is, not as they would have him be. And Jesus was showing Him as he is, not as they would have him be. But even though the crowd had miraculously received a free and satisfying meal the day before, they still wanted God to come to them on their terms. Despite the fact that God was speaking to them in ways that they should have understood, they wanted God's signs to be accommodated to them.

They cited the part of today's first reading. To the Manna that Moses had given as a sign of God's approval, but conveniently made no mention of their ancestor's dissatisfaction with it. Finding our real needs and not just our perceived needs is not always easy. But tricks weren't his style; truth was. So he answered that it wasn't Moses who gave the Manna It was God. And the Bread of God gives life to the world.

Then Jesus said startlingly that he himself is the bread of life from heaven. Jesus was clearly stating that he is replacing the Torah. He, not the Torah, is the way of eternal life. Unless we fill ourselves with him, we're not just empty and hungry: we're spiritually dead. We are what we eat. If we pursue only junk food like fame, prestige, wealth, or power, we shall die of malnutrition.

The perception in the letter to the Ephesians that the world is so turned in upon itself as not to be able to see God. As a matter of fact many material problems are caused by spiritual ones. Hunger in today's world, for example, isn't caused by our planet lacking physical resources to provide food, it's because the spirit of Christ is lacking to distribute the resources properly.

In the Gospel for today, the people had come back again. Again they surrounded him with eager eyes and ready stomachs. He looked around and said: "I know why you come to me again, not because of me but because of the bread I gave you:

You want more bread
You want more fish,
You want more food.

They watched him
With even more eager eyes
And the most hungry ones must have already felt the water gush into their mouths.

Once more he looked around and said: I am not going to give you that bread any more. I am the bread of life, take me as your bread.

They must have been unable to understand what he meant and I wonder if we really do understand what he meant after the 2,000 years that separate us from those words.

All the same the very language we use after those two thousand years might still have something from the bread he spoke about.

In English we sometimes say that something, an attitude or skill is like bread and butter to someone. It means that she or he is so accustomed to it that it has become a second or even a first nature to her or to him.

That is what he must have meant when he told them
Take me
Take me,
As your bread in life.

Take me,
Take me
As the bread the Father is sending you from heaven.

Take me as the foundation of your life.
Take me as the food you live on from day to day, from hour to hour.

If we take him that way as our bread and butter in life we would choose always what is good for the world, what is good for humanity, what is good for all of us

God help us to become like the bread from God in Jesus Christ that we feed on!

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, he grants us no temporary snack, but the food that endures to eternal life.