

This Gospel we just heard, which is part of the Bread of Life discourse taken from the 6th Chapter of John's Gospel, is very Eucharistic. Not only that but it shows us how the Eucharist is meant to transform us and our understanding of Christ.

The Gospel comes right after Jesus fed the 5000 men. And this miracle has drawn people toward Jesus. Yet the people still don't have a full understanding of who He really is. Jesus says this himself, they are following him because they liked the bread they ate. But they didn't understand these signs, instead they knew Jesus could feed them and they flocked to him.

This is nothing new for God, of course. The Israelites seemed to come to him every time they needed something, and then sort of push him off to the side once those needs were met.

And I think this problem still exists today. Earlier this week I was talking with a friend who informed me that he thinks people who are wealthy tend to feel that they have things pretty much in control and have little need for God, that is until something beyond their ability to control happens. And while I don't want to stereotype everyone, I think there is some truth to this comment. As people who live in 21st century America, we are all among the wealthiest people to ever roam this planet. And at times our wealth and power does lead us into a false sense of security. When everything is going well, we tend to forget about God and go about our merry way. And then suddenly things stop going according to plan. Someone gets sick, the stock market drops 40%, our nation comes under attack, etc. When this happens, we turn to God and begin to grumble like the Israelites. Practically speaking then, God becomes a being who we can go to when we need something that is beyond our means, but is not someone who we try intimately involve in our lives. That is to say, we seek God selfishly, to fulfill our own needs, and not for his own sake.

St. Augustine observed this same phenomenon in his day. He states that the Church is full of people who are seeking Christ for something other than his own sake. He asks, "How many seek Jesus for no other objective than to get some kind of temporal benefit! One has a business that has run into problems, and he seeks the intercession of the clergy; another is oppressed by someone more powerful than himself and he flies to the Church...one person wants this and another person wants that."

Anyone who says the saints are not relevant to our modern world obviously has not read them. I think Augustine is right. So often when we come to God, it is because we want something. And often times what we want are not the right things. And Jesus calls us out on this attitude in today's Gospel. He says "you are looking for me because you ate the loaves and were filled," but not because you want to be with me. Instead you should look not toward your own desires but do enter into relationship with God.

If we want to truly enter into relationship with God, our primary means of relating to God cannot be to seek some temporal benefit. God is not our financial advisor who we enter into relationship with in order that we can get the material things we want. When we enter into relationship with God, it should be for God's sake. We should have no ulterior motives. God should be treated like our best friend. We don't hang around with our best friends because they can do or give us

something. We enjoy being with them for their sake. So when we enter into relationship with God, we should do so for God's sake. This, of course, means that we should enter not with the intent of asking God to do my will, but asking God, how can I do your will.

This, of course, is the big question. What is God's will, or as the people in the Gospel phrased it, "What is the Work of God?" Wouldn't it be nice to know that. What work is God calling me to perform? And Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel - "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent."

Believing in God, believing in Jesus is the work. This is where Martin Luther went astray. Luther drove a wedge between work and faith, as if they were separate. But Jesus conflates the two. To work is to believe. And to believe is to work. Work and faith, in other words, go hand in hand. St. Augustine says that "Christ's members humbly do the Father's will even as he did."

It is our works that show our beliefs. We should not sin boldly, as Luther suggests. No, we should come to Christ, who is the bread of life, and take him into our bodies (as we will all do in a few minutes). When we treat Christ as the bread that nourishes us, we are compelled to do the will of the Father, just as Christ Himself did. And in this, we are transformed. We are no longer like the Israelites who were seeking God for their own temporal benefit. We come before Christ not seeking to have him do our will, but instead seeking to do *HIS* will, and in doing so, we cease to work for food that perishes and instead work for the food that endures forever.

So, brothers and sisters, as we received Christ, the Bread of Life, in this Eucharist, let us do so not because we are seeking to have our temporal needs met, but because we are seeking that which will endure for eternal life.