

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Exodus 16:2-4.12-15 / John 6:24-35)
02.08.2015
Security or/and Trust

The whole episode of the gift of the manna in the desert is very famous, it is mentioned many times in the Old and New Testaments and it has become a key passage for our understanding of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Precisely because we have read this biblical passage mainly in connection with our practice and theology of the Eucharist, we may have forgotten that the text, and particularly verse 4, contains an important teaching for our spiritual life. Verse 4 reads: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Now I will rain down bread for you from the heavens. Each day the people are to go out and gather the day’s portion’”.

Having heard the complaints of his people – and this is a very important point – God promises that he will provide for them. So first God hears and then he provides. But that is not all, and here is maybe the most difficult thing for us, God tells us that he will provide when we need it, each day we will receive what we need for the day. In verses which are not part of our reading, we are told that “those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage”. When some among the people tried to keep some manna for the following day “it bred worms and became foul” (Ex 16:18.20).

So we are not given more than we need and it is not given to us beforehand. This is a very important rule for our journey as human beings and as Christians.

What is going to happen tomorrow or next week may be worrying or threatening, and yet there is only one thing which matters: the present moment, here and now, where God is and where his grace is given generously. God cannot give us now what we will need tomorrow because tomorrow does not exist. Only the present is real.

In a time when people were more attuned to the rhythm of life and nature, the challenge may have not seemed so big for them, but for us who are always tempted to believe that we are in control of all things and particularly of our time, it has become a huge spiritual and human difficulty.

In an immature way, because we want everything immediately, because we cannot cope with delays, we buy more and more, we accumulate possessions. Like squirrels before winter we hoard and store up in order to feel secure and content... that is how we like to feel!

All the commercials we see play on our desire for security and contentment. They want us to believe that if we buy more all shall be well. The reality is that one day or other we are all led to experience that this is not true, that it does not work.

In his last encyclical letter, Pope Francis makes a fair diagnosis of the situation when he writes: “The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume” (*Laudato* n. 204).

When we doubt about our self-worth, when we feel insecure and empty, when we are challenged about the meaning of our lives and all that we do, then in our desperate longing for peace, our first reaction is to “buy, own and consume”.

Like the people of Israel in the desert, we are called to rely on God alone and to trust that he is going to provide what we need when we need it. Time is given to us in order to learn to let go of all things and to walk freely, depending on God, on his on-going generosity which calls us to be generous as he is. Pope Francis reminds us: “Jesus does not ask us to

store his grace in a safe! Jesus does not ask us for this, but he wants us to use it to benefit others” (Angelus, 16.11.2014).

We should not let our fears be the driving force of our lives. They make us greedy and suspicious, they produce violence and division.

The courage and hope we need to go through all the ups and downs of life, the inner strength we need to fight all the demons which threaten us, are given to us by God and by nothing and nobody else.

The challenge does not concern only material things, in our hearts and minds, we store ideological views, strong convictions and beliefs which are no longer relevant or necessary but only help us to feel secure and in control.

At the end of the day, material things and thoughts and ideas clutter us, they weigh us down, slow our pace and prevent the Lord from finding a home in our hearts and lives.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus reveals the way forward for us: “You must believe in the one God has sent”. And here *believe* means far more than adhering to a set of formal truths, it is about loving Jesus, living as he lived, being in him; as St Paul writes, to believe is to have the Spirit of Christ (Rm 8:9).

We may still face difficult situations, complain to God and wrestle with him, we may still struggle with fears and feelings of insecurity. And yet because we are in Christ, all things are different, fears and insecurity are no longer the compulsive motive for our buying, owning and consuming, instead our feeling of insecurity should lead us to throw ourselves all the more trustingly into God’s arms and to rely on his unbounded generosity.

The people of Israel had to grow in freedom and to mature in faith. The desert was a hard school for them and yet it was the place of their birth as the people of God, the place of the covenant of love with God.

In our turn we have to learn to trust in the Lord. Life, fullness of life is made possible when we consent to stop clinging to everything and everybody so that we may be free for the Lord. May we journey with hearts rooted in God, with lives secure in his providence.