



IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 1st AUGUST 2021

Readings: Exodus 16.2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78.22-28;
Ephesians 4.1-16; John 6.24-35

Last weekend in Sydney CBD we saw scenes of people, many of them waving placards, protesting the lockdown and vaccinations. The slogans were very revealing. "My Body, My Freedom, My Choice." "Salvation, not Vaccination." "The Blood of Christ is my Vaccine." It would be pointless to respond to these one-liners. The protesters were not interested in reasoned discussion. A distorted and twisted understanding of freedom turns freedom into a weapon used to prevent the implementation of measures designed for public safety and well-being.

Our political leaders, medical and health care workers, police, and others are working hard to keep us safe, and bring us out of the lockdown and the pandemic as safely and as quickly as possible. Yes, mistakes have been made, some actions could have been taken sooner, but only by pulling together will we be able to emerge from this difficult time sooner.

In today's reading from St John's Gospel, Jesus has fed the five thousand with some loaves and fishes. He and his disciples then make their way to the other side of the lake, only to be met by the same crowd that Jesus had fed the day before. They ask Jesus when he arrived there. Jesus ignores their question and tells them directly, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for

me, not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves." (Jn 6:26). Jesus exposes the underlying motives of the crowd. They follow him, not because they want him, but because they want what he can give them.

Our culture trains us to think it's all about us. As a result, we tend to take everything personally. We are trained to think we are the centre of the universe. We then judge people, life experiences, events, relationships, and organisations (including the Church) on what they can do for *me*. We also react swiftly and sometimes violently to any perceived threat to our freedom.

"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." Jesus fed the crowd, to be sure. But their focus was on satisfying their physical hunger. That is important, but it can become a preoccupation. We then become materialistic and solely concerned with accumulating more and more goods and possessions. These can never bring us true satisfaction or assuage the deeper hunger inside us.

Jesus goes on to say, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal" (Jn 6:27). There is a restless longing in all of us. We live in a world of abundance and beauty and pleasure and colour and vibrancy. But there will come a time when it will all disappear. It doesn't last.

We have a desire that nothing and nobody in this world can satisfy. We are made for more. We and all the rest of creation will someday be no more. No matter how hard we work, no matter how much we accumulate in terms of houses, cars, food, holidays, friends, achievements, worthy goals, and causes, it will one day be all gone. None of those things last and none of them will ultimately satisfy the deepest longing of the heart. Relationships have ups and downs, there are good days and bad days, but even the best relationships will eventually come to an end.

Achievements are very fulfilling. We're lauded and feted and admired and we find fulfillment as we should, but the day will come when it's all gone.

Certainly, these things give us an enormous amount of pleasure and fulfillment. One thing I discovered when I first came to the Diocese of Newcastle was a sense that life should be enjoyed. Unfortunately, that has been replaced with a sort of Puritanism in many places.

The Church is not a volunteer service agency or a social club. It is the Body of Christ. The crowd followed Jesus, hoping for another free meal, for their needs to be met on demand. Jesus tells them there's something far more important: the hunger for the bread that is eternal life. "I am that bread of life", says Jesus.

That is why the Eucharist is the central act of Christian worship. The centrality of the altar, the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, remind us repeatedly that the Church is about Jesus crucified, risen and reigning in our midst as the Lamb who was slain.

There is something in us that pushes us beyond anything this world can offer. "Do not work for food that perishes". Jesus Christ himself is the only good that can satisfy us. So, we can see now why the Eucharist is an anticipation of heaven. It's an anticipation of the satisfaction we will find in the presence of God. That's why we sing and dance and why lockdown is so difficult. We stand and we sit and we kneel and we gesture in joy and unself-consciousness. That's why it's a tragedy that so many stay away from the Sunday liturgy. We are happy to run after these things of the world but they're not going to satisfy your heart. Christ alone can do that.

The crowds then, as the crowds today, come fixated on their needs, our needs, "What can Jesus do for us?" "What's in it for me?" but then Jesus re-directs our gaze away from ourselves and our mundane concerns and gives us himself, the bread of life, the true bread from heaven.

Fr Mark