

## Words for the way pastoral notes during lockdown – LXXIX: *The Bread of Life II*

John 6:51-58

### **Opening Prayer:**

*May the words which we hear and read, and upon which we mediate, speak to our hearts, our minds, and our souls. May God the Holy Spirit be with us here at this time and in this place. Amen*

As we were about to enter into lockdown on Thursday, I was driving home from the University Campus having released our college staff to go home to their families and make the necessary preparations for at least the next seven days of our lockdown. I thought that I would briefly stop at my small local supermarket to buy a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread. I knew that I was low on milk and had no bread. As I approached the shop in our small village square, I noticed the presence of a crowd of people. It was as if everyone had run out of supplies and needed to restock. One could sense a certain nervous tension and fear in the crowd. Once inside getting milk was fine, but the normally well stocked bread shelves with many varieties of bread, were completely stripped bare. I then thought of trying to make my purchase of bread from the small baker's shop in the square, but he too was out of bread.

As I was driving to my apartment, sans bread, I thought of our Gospel reading for today and this reflection which I had started to write the evening prior. The people want bread. Now I know that being unable get a loaf of bread on a Canberra afternoon is a 'first world problem.' I certainly would not go hungry. However, the people's desire for bread when faced with a lockdown, had a certain tone attached to it... The people want bread.

Last week, our reflection was based upon bread, and bread being a basic food commodity. A basic food that sustains life, across many civilisations bread making in various forms has ensured that people were fed and nourished. From that illustrative motif to Jesus telling us that he is the 'Bread of Life.'

To recap where we are in the narrative of the Gospels, you may recall, (and I would encourage you to re-read the sixth chapter of The Gospel according to Saint John), John records Jesus feeding of the five thousand, walking on water, and now a discourse on the other side of the lake by Jesus with some people who followed Jesus to that location. If one was to read the Gospel reading from last week's Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) (John 6:35, 41-51) and back-to-back with this week's

reading, one may almost feel that that the Apostle John has made a mistake or stuttered in his record of the narrative of Jesus speaking to the people. There are some who would like to link this passage to the Lord's Supper. The links of the bread of life eaten and blood drank, were the allegorical terms of phrase used by Jesus:

**“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man... John 6:53a**

And the drinking of his blood:

**“...and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” John 6:53b**

There is a Eucharistic feel to the passage. For those who are of faith, Jesus as the living bread is a strong motive. One needs to keep in mind also that the institution of the Lord's Supper is yet to be given at a later time to that particular incident described. Like often in the Scriptures, there are often foretastes of what is yet to come. Therefore, one may sit comfortably with the connection to the Eucharist.

Further, the allegorical term of phrase is problematic if one was to consider it literally. Some commentators point out that there would have been those who upon hearing the words of Jesus would have only thought in the concrete terms thus missing the actual very rich hope of which Jesus was actually speaking. Jesus the bread of life that came down from heaven is a beautiful illustration of hope and eternal life. In ancient times the Israelites were fed on manna (bread) that fell to them from heaven. The manna sustained their bodies, but only for a while. Now we have the true bread of heaven sustaining us for all eternity. That is the bread that people really want and need to reach out for.

As we live through this time of uncertainty, in this time of danger, in this time of pandemic, let us be reassured that all who reach out to Christ may discover the living bread and the life blood of eternal life. Let us look to Christ for hope and having seen that hope let us be open to share that hope with our neighbours, friends, and family. We may share the bread from the Lord's Table, and all will be fed.

**Prayer:**

Bread of heaven, you feed us in the depths  
of grief, sin, and hostility.  
Nourish us with your word  
through the long hours of tears,  
and in the dawning awareness  
of our need for forgiveness,  
so that we may be redeemed by your steadfast love  
And be fed with the real bread of heaven. **Amen.**