

Eighteenth Sunday – Ordinary Time – Cycle B  
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There's a restaurant in NYC that prides itself on always pleasing the customer....One evening a man came in and ordered dinner, and when it arrived he complained that there was only one dinner roll....The waiter quickly returned with four dinner rolls, but the man still wasn't satisfied, "That's not good enough. I love bread!"....The next evening the man came in again and the waiter brought him his dinner, this time with six dinner rolls....The man said, "That's better, but aren't you still being a little cheap?"...The waiter returned with a basket full of dinner rolls, but even that didn't stop the man from complaining....The owner decided to end this for good, and so the next night when the complainer came in for dinner, the owner was ready for him....He brought out a 6-ft long loaf of French bread, placed it on the man's table, then stood there waiting for a reaction. ...The man looked at the gigantic loaf of bread and grumbled, "So, I see we're back to one dinner roll again."

I guess some people **really** love bread... I love bread, especially the hard-crust Italian bread that was always on our dinner table growing up in East Utica...I still feel the sting from all the times I got my hand slapped trying to sneak it into the bread basket before dinner was ready...Madonna mia!!

So why all this talk about bread? Because that's what our Gospel is about...It's about two different kinds of bread: the kind that the crowds of people wanted Jesus to give them...and the kind that Jesus offered them. ...Two different kinds of bread...The people in our Gospel story were part of the thousands that Jesus had miraculously fed from five barley loaves and a few little fish...Most of them were peasants whose lives – for the most part – were a never ending struggle for bread...for the basic things they needed to survive....In Jesus, they saw a man who could take care of all their material needs. ...Their troubles were over...They would never go hungry again...They were so taken by this miracle man that they wanted to make Him king...But working miracles wasn't what Jesus was all about...That was something He did so the people would believe that He was sent by God...so they would listen as He told them what God was like and what the Kingdom of God was like,...and how He would lead them to abundant and eternal life if they believed in Him and trusted Him.

Jesus had more in mind than feeding their physical hunger...His purpose was something deeper than food for the body... He was more concerned for their spiritual needs...They were asking for bread for their bellies...He offered them bread for their souls... When Jesus said to them, "I am the Bread of Life...whoever comes to me will never hunger,...whoever believes in me will never thirst,"...He was not speaking about food and water. He was operating on a spiritual level...He was telling them as He is telling us,..."If you come to me, if you believe in me, trust in me,...I guarantee you will always have what you need to deal with the circumstances and challenges and problems of this life...as I lead you into everlasting life."

Wow! That's an awesome promise. Is Jesus saying He has the solutions to all of the complex issues we face in our daily lives?...I mean, can His teachings really help us raise a troublesome teenager,...pay our mortgage,...find a job...or get better grades?... Can His teachings give us a clue to how to handle a demanding boss, or unmotivated employees,...or help us find the time to do all the things others expect us to do?... Can His teachings help us when we are faced with a serious illness or when we have to make a decision about a parent or spouse with Alzheimer's? ...Well, I think the answer is a qualified "yes."...YES, believing in Jesus, having faith in Jesus,...living as He taught us...will help us better deal with life's pressures and problems,...BUT it's not going to make them go away....Jesus never said that having faith in Him would assure us a life of clear skies and smooth sailing...He never said that believing in

Him would always make things turn out the way we wanted. ...Boy, ain't that the truth...Let's see... Raise your hand if your faith in God, in Jesus Christ has given you a care-free, stress-free, problem-free life... *That's what I thought.*

We've all had times when our faith has brought us comfort and peace.... But there also have been times when we've been disappointed...We've waited for answers that never came...To put it bluntly, we've had moments when we have felt that God has let us down: "Lord, why are you letting this happen to me?...Why aren't You answering me?"...If your sitting there thinking, "Hey, I feel pretty good...because this hasn't ever happened to me,"...don't worry, your time will come...It does for all of us. ...And we shouldn't be embarrassed to admit it...Read the Bible and you'll find we are in some pretty good company...There was poor Job, a good and faithful man,..who in his terrible suffering complained to God," Curse the day I was born, ...I wish I had died in my mother's womb." ...Then there was David who prayed, "How long, O Lord, will you wait to help me?" ...And who was it who cried out from a cross, "My God, my God why have You abandoned me?" I think His initials are J C....Yep, it happens even to the best of us...eventually to all of us.

Every human life will know problems, pressures, stress,...even suffering...And whether these things happen by accident, or by what others do to us, or by the choices we make,...what matters most is how we respond when they happen....Unfortunately, we often respond in ways that don't help at all...or that even make things worse... That's when we need to turn to Jesus. ...He said, "I am the Bread of Life...If you come to Me and believe in Me, you will never be hungry." ...Now the hunger He talks about is not the hunger we feel three times a day in our stomachs (six times for you teens) ...He's talking about the hungers, the longings deep in our souls...We are hungry for love ...hungry for joy...hungry for peace...We hunger for forgiveness...We hunger for courage...We hunger for strength...Jesus will satisfy these spiritual longings... if we come to Him...if we believe in Him.

Do you remember when you were a child and you were taught that there were three things you were supposed to do before you crossed the street, to get through the traffic and safely to the other side?...You had to (*help me out*): STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN...It's almost the same thing when you are facing troubles and problems, and pressures in your life...If you want to get through them and get safely to the other side,...you have to STOP, DROP, and LISTEN... STOP - stop doing those things that aren't working, that are getting you absolutely nowhere. STOP and then DROP...drop to your knees ...pray to Jesus ...tell Him what's going on (He already knows, but saying it helps us to see it more clearly). Then LISTEN...Really listen. ...Give Jesus your full attention...Come to Him expecting to hear Him, and He WILL speak to you...You probably won't hear His voice, but somehow He will tell you what He wants you to know...what He wants you to do...It might happen right there as He guides your thoughts while you are down on your knees ...Or it could be later as He speaks through the words of a friend or family member...or a song on the radio....or a billboard along the road...or maybe through a passage in the Bible...or in a homily you managed to stay awake for...Somehow, He will speak to you...He will get through to you...but you have to LISTEN...and we don't always do that very well.

So, here's the thing...When trouble hits,...when life deals us a blow...and we're not handling it very well...what should we do?....STOP, DROP and LISTEN....When were faced with a difficult problem or a tough decision and the path to take isn't very clear...what should we do?...STOP, DROP, and LISTEN .... When everything's going wrong and nothing seems to be going right ...what should we do?...STOP, DROP and LISTEN....When we are getting stressed out by the huge pile of things we have to do, and by all that others expect from us,...what should we do?...STOP, DROP, and LISTEN ... I guess we can say that whenever we run into a hill or

mountain on the road of life ...we should STOP, DROP, and LISTEN ....Because Jesus promised that He would give us what we need,...not that He would flatten out those hills and mountains so we wouldn't have to climb them,...but that He would give us what we need to get over them and to the other side.

And this my friends is the Good News we celebrate today and every time we come together for Eucharist...That God the Father sent us His Son Jesus Christ not only as Savior to open to us the gates to eternal life, ...but also as the true Bread from Heaven to feed us and nourish us and strengthen us for THIS life... In a few moments we will come forward to be fed by the Bread of Life...As the Body of Christ is offered to us, let's respond with a hearty "AMEN!" as our way of saying Thank You, Lord, Thank You, for loving me so much.... AMEN.