

## 18<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (August 1, 2021)

You may remember I recently mentioned in the bulletin the person who was supposed to give a talk to a group of retirees about absent-mindedness...but forgot to show up. Here's another great true-story 'senior moment': G. K. Chesterton was a brilliant British writer who was one day hurrying down the street, late for a very important appointment. But, realizing he was thirsty, he stopped by a local dairy for a glass of milk. Then he stopped at a nearby store to buy something he had meant to get for some time. Only then did he remember where he was supposed to be going—his own wedding! Now, that's a 'senior moment' if I've ever heard one...

No doubt about it—it can be so easy to forget, and not just because of absent-mindedness or the aging process. The readings today present two rather amazing examples:

--in the first reading from Exodus we hear about the Israelites complaining against Moses: 'why did you bring us out of Egypt where we had enough to eat? But you bring us to die of famine here in the desert!' They had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years, and it was a time of terrible suffering for them. Moreover, their complaints now took place very soon after God had delivered them from Pharaoh's army and brought them through the Red Sea; after such a miracle, did they really think that God would now abandon them?? How soon they forgot!

--in the gospel: after hearing Jesus tell the crowd that the work of God is to believe in the one he sent (i.e. himself), they ask 'what sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?' This is also amazing: this is the very same crowd who had just seen Jesus multiply those five barley loaves and two fish into enough to feed 5000 people. And they ask Jesus 'what can you do'?? He had just shown them—how soon they forgot!

Of course, we aren't always forgetful; there are many things we remember easily. This past Friday I had the funeral service for a first-cousin of mine who died last weekend. We grew up together, and so there was a lot of sharing of memories—both with her family, and with my brother and sister who were there too. Other things we may remember too easily—for example, we may still be bitter and holding a grudge against someone who hurt or offended us many years ago by word or deed.

But do we remember the most important thing of all—do we remember all that God has done for us? Are we conscious, for example, of the fact that our lives, our very existence is the result of God's creative act? Do we remember that Jesus his Son is the one and only reason we can hope for eternal life and perfect peace and joy and that he is the one and only way to the Father as he told the apostles at the Last Supper? Do we remember that Jesus gives his very self to us in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist? At the end of today's gospel Jesus told the crowd "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." And just wait until next Sunday's gospel when he will become even more explicit about this gift of himself to us in the Eucharist; as we will learn, his words caused huge scandal and outrage.

That is precisely why Jesus gave us the Eucharist, the true and ultimate Bread of Life: to help us remember what he did for us. After Jesus changed bread into his Body and wine into his Blood at the Last Supper, he told the apostles "do this in memory of me"—i.e. 'do this to help you remember and to make present to others what I will accomplish tomorrow when I am nailed to

the cross'. It is why the Church obliges us to take part in Holy Mass on Sundays and certain holy days—not simply to lay down a rule for rules' sake, but instead to help us remember the incomparable gift that Jesus gave us, the gift of himself, his Body and Blood.

Otherwise, our frail human nature being what it is, we are prone to forget—just like the Israelites did in the desert when they forgot all that God had already done for them, just like the crowd did who challenged Jesus to 'do a sign' for them when they forgot what he had just done in multiplying the loaves and fishes.

The more seriously we approach our life of faith through prayer, the sacraments, and acts of generosity and mercy out of love for Christ and others, the more we will remember what Jesus has first done for us. The more we do that, the more grateful and joyful we will be. It really does work out that way; it really is all about Jesus and his amazing love and the gift of himself to us. Let's remember that...shall we?