

Thanksgiving, Gospel Year C

Full of Loaf or Full of Life? (Jesus asking)

John 6:25-35

Thanksgiving

Analysis by Marcus Felde

25 When [the disciples] found [Jesus] on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."



DIAGNOSIS: Thankful to be Full of Loaf

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Working for Food that Perishes

Sometimes, we don't pay attention to what we are praying during the Lord's Prayer until we get to the part which goes, "Give us today our daily bread," which of course we recognize (thanks to Luther) as an appeal for absolutely everything essential to our life. Do we ever feel it, when we feel the pinch of necessity! We drop everything and take care of survival. Abraham Maslow wrote that we must, in his "hierarchy of needs." We do precisely what Jesus told those people they were doing—exploiting his appearance among them as an opportunity to take care of today (v. 26).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Their God Is the

Belly” (Phil. 3:19)

If we are devoted first and finally to taking care of our needs, we effectively place ourselves at the service of whatever or whoever fills those needs. Autocrats of various ages have purchased peoples for themselves with bread—or bread equivalents. (Without the food, circuses are never quite enough!) Functionally, no one is an atheist. All are subservient to something or someone, and it’s a sad substitute for fulfilling the first and greatest commandment. The stomach stands as a symbol for all appetites, of course, and is the most convenient analogy for a self whose self is turned in on self: I love pizza!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Whose End Is Destruction” (Phil. 3:19)

“In the long run,” John Maynard Keynes used to say, “we are all dead.” In the long run, Jesus once pointed out, all food passes (see Mark 7:20). “Is not life more than food?” (Mark 6:25). He who fed five thousand because they were hungry did not reduce people to their appetites. Rather, in the midst of that self-giving he pointed to the “life that really is life” (1 Timothy 6:19). Jesus points out to the shallow multitude that by seeing in him only a source of bread, they are missing the SIGN. The sign of life. They are passing up the gift Jesus is in favor of a present he hands out.

PROGNOSIS: Thankful to be Full of Life



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): “the Father gives you true bread from heaven”

The incarnation of Jesus was the feeding of no mere five thousand, but billions. The world. With a bread that answers the need to be fully human, like Jesus.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): “To those who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12)

In the pericope for Thanksgiving, it is put this way: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (v. 29). “Take and eat,” we say—and we’re not just being polite, we’re being urgent, as though we were encouraging a victim of starvation to open their lips and receive their first nourishment in weeks.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): “The food that endures for eternal life, which the Son will give you . . .” (v. 27)

Maslow was not far wrong; survival is indeed step one. But true survival, as in eternal life, depends not on calories but blessing. From there, in freedom and peace, we go on to move our arms and limbs in deeds of mercy and our lips in songs of praise unending, living to the glory of God.