

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

“Like manna in the desert” is a phrase we sometimes use to refer to a situation where some benefit comes just at the right moment—just when we are on the verge of giving up, is just what we needed, and which fills us with gratitude and a sense of awe at how completely we’ve been cared for.

In today’s first reading the manna in the desert comes just in time to stave off a rebellion of the people of Israel, who are on the verge of abandoning Moses and going back to slavery in Egypt. At least there they had food to eat!

It’s true that when the manna appeared Moses had to explain to the people what to do with it, how to use it to keep themselves alive, and what the stipulations were for being sure they would continue to receive it.

For one thing, they could only collect the amount they needed for that day. No hoarding! This would teach them to develop an ongoing trust in God and his faithfulness to the covenant he was making with the people.

From the perspective of several centuries later the people who had been fed by Jesus and the miracle of the five loaves and two fish were looking for the same thing: they wanted God to be there for them on a daily basis like he had been for their ancestors.

And Jesus tries to get them to see that that’s exactly what he is offering—only this time it’s not about collecting a daily supply of bread, it’s about entering into a relationship with God and particularly with His

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Son whom God had sent into the world.

Relationship is a lot different than works. The people following Jesus seem to think that there's something like a checklist that they need to follow, and if they can just check the things off the list that they need to do, then they will get the reward.

There's no doubt that the Christian life does lead us to have to be about certain activities—the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, for example—but that comes after and is a result of the primary work we are involved in: developing a relationship of trust in God and committing ourselves to being witnesses of what he is doing in the world.

What Jesus has in mind is that this relationship building will be a constant activity—sort of like gathering manna in the desert every morning. It, too, is not something we can hoard from one day to the next, or expect that spending a lot of time on it on Sunday will somehow carry us through the following six days of the week.

In addition to keeping the Lord's Day holy the daily attention to our relationship with God will keep it healthy and life giving.

That does not necessarily mean daily attendance at Mass, although those who do practice these element of our faith will tell you all they get out of it. It does mean daily attendance to something. And since the characteristics of our lives vary so much from one person to the next, the only person that can build into

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their life daily elements of the practice of the faith is you!

What are you doing to practice the faith daily? What could you be doing?

I find it interesting that the Lord's Prayer has built into it this daily quality of attending to our relationship with God. Harkening back to the gift of manna in the desert, Jesus designs his prayer so that we who pray it only ask for "our daily bread."

That means that there is a built-in presumption that we will be back tomorrow asking for our daily bread again.

So, maybe that would be a good place to start if you're thinking that there is no room in your daily life for prayer. Start with praying the Our Father. Find someplace that you are every day—in the car, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, I don't know—and post the Our Father there. And highlight the phrase "give us this day our daily bread" as a reminder that you are only asking for today, and that you'll be back tomorrow to work on the relationship again.

And then, pay attention to where that practice takes you. I'm confident that only good will come of it. Who knows? Before long you might even be recommending the practice to others!

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1. “Like manna in the desert” what we say when we get what we need just in time. An expression of gratitude and relief.
2. 1<sup>st</sup> reading: manna comes just in time to stave off a rebellion. The people are ready to go back into slavery in Egypt for the sake of some food.

True, Moses did have to explain what it was, how to use it, what the stipulations were: One of them was “No hoarding!” Requirement to gather daily would develop ongoing trust in God and his faithfulness to the covenant.

3. Fast forward several centuries: Miracle of the feeding w/ 5 loaves and 2 fish led to people to look for feed them on a daily basis like he had for their ancestors.

Jesus tries to get them to see that that’s exactly what he’s offering—only this time it’s not about bread, it’s about entering into an ongoing relationship with God, with His Son whom He has sent.

“What must we do? As if it had to do with a checklist which, when completed, led to a reward.

4. No doubt, the Christian life does involve doing something—but actions like the corporal works of mercy come after the primary work: developing our relationship of trust in God and his faithfulness.

Jesus: this relationship building has to be a constant activity—like gathering manna everyday.

Not something we can store up on Sunday for use during the week.

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As important as keeping holy the Lord's day is, there are aspects of the relationship that require daily attendance.

5. What to do when life becomes hectic and finding time daily for maintenance of our relationship with God becomes a challenge?

Something each of us will have to figure out according to the concrete circumstances of our lives.

Interesting to note that the Lord's prayer has built into it this notion of the daily character of our relationship with God: "give us today our daily bread" harkens back to the practice of collection manna daily in the desert.

There's a built in presumption there that when we ask for our daily bread we will be back tomorrow to ask again.

6. For the person with no time to pray my recommendation: Start with praying the Lord's Prayer.

Post it someplace where you will see it daily so you are reminded.

Highlight the phrase "give us this day our daily bread" as a reminder that you are only asking for today and that you will be back tomorrow to work on the relationship some more.

Then, pay attention to what happens, where the practice takes you.

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This simple start can be like a mustard seed for your spiritual life.

Before long, you may even be recommending it to others!