

Herman Gockel, in his classic devotional book *My Hand in His* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), shares the story of an elderly man on his deathbed. His family has come to be with him. One of his sons is a pastor. It's Saturday, the next day is Sunday. The man tells his son to go home and preach to his people the next day. He tells his son that if he dies while his son is gone, his son will know where to find him.

"You'll know where to find me." Imagine dying and living in the kind of faith to say that! Imagine sharing that kind of confidence and assurance with **your** loved ones! Eternal life is real. It's life that really matters. It's life that makes a difference. Life in this world will finally fail us. But not the life God gives. Not the life Jesus gives. Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal" (v 27).

Earlier, Jesus had miraculously fed over five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish. This was meant to be a sign pointing **beyond** itself to something **more**. To Jesus as Son of God. To Jesus as the source of eternal life. To Jesus as "the true bread from heaven." To Jesus as "the bread of life." Because Jesus, the **Bread** of Life, is the source of **eternal** life.

Unfortunately, the people around Jesus stayed stuck at the sign, at the bread, at the free meal. Jesus attempts to move them along, to lift their sights to a higher level: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal" (vv 26–27). They respond with good intentions: "Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?'" (v 28). And Jesus answers: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (v 29). The work of God, the work God desires of us, the work God works in us, is not work but **faith**. It's not what we do but what God gives us in Jesus.

But, the people had a hard time catching on: "So they said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat"'" (vv 30–31). They were remembering how God fed His people in the wilderness with manna. Today's Old Testament Reading is the backstory to our Gospel. Jesus says to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes

down from heaven and gives life to the world” (vv 32–33). Now, they begin to get it: “They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ And that’s when Jesus says to them, ‘**I** am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (vv 34–35). Jesus’ words about never thirsting remind us of His words to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,” he told her, “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13–14). Eternal life is God’s gift in Jesus. The bread of life is God’s gift. Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He is the bread of life.

Jesus’ discourse or sermon on the bread of life goes on to the end of John 6. We’ll hear more of it next Sunday and the Sunday after that. At this point, bread, hunger and eating, thirsting and drinking are all metaphors. Put together, **all** together, they’re all about Jesus and believing in Him. Jesus is the source of eternal life. Believing in Jesus is God’s work in us. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

As with the crowd that Jesus fed, engaged, and taught, we sometimes tend to stay stuck at the sign, at the lowest level of things, on material, physical things. We focus on food, clothes, shelter, on the things of our earthly existence, on physical and emotional blessings, and on the comforts of this life. But it is for **higher** things that Jesus came. It is for the purpose of giving and sustaining **eternal** life that God gave us Jesus. Life with God, our life with God, has been **disrupted** and **interrupted** by sin. Our deepest hunger, though we don’t always realize it, is for God. Jesus, in His suffering and death on the cross, and in His resurrection from the dead, satisfies this hunger, fills the hole we all have in our hearts for God. He reconnects us with God. For eternity. As Paul writes in Romans 8, “Nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ” (Rom 8:39). Nothing!

Bread, despite the bad rap on carbs these days, is a staple of physical life. It sustains life. It’s the “stuff” of life. It’s with this in mind that Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” When He was in the wilderness tempted by the devil—when He was hungry, tempted to turn stones into loaves of bread—Jesus quoted words from Deuteronomy 8: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mt 4:4). Jesus is that living Word. He says in John 5, “As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (Jn 5:26).

Jesus told the crowd, “You are seeking me . . . because you ate your fill of the loaves” (Jn 6:26). What do **we** seek from Jesus? We often seek what we can **get** from Jesus rather than seeking Jesus Himself. We seek feel-good things. We seek things on every other level than spiritual. In describing Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, John says, “Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them” (6:11). “When he had given thanks.” Thanksgiving is not just “for” but “to.” Giving thanks is about a relationship with the giver. **God** is the Giver. In today’s Epistle, Paul reminds us that Jesus feeds and nourishes His Body, the Church, to build it up in faith, love, and maturity: “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). Grace to live life fully, faithfully, and eternally with God, in relationship with God.

We often feel threatened by so many things: aging, health concerns, hostility, antagonism, from the world around us and the people in it. Also, weakness, brokenness, failure, and regret. More than anything else, we need to feed on **Jesus** in **faith**. When we feed on Jesus in faith, we live eternally. We live and die in the same confidence and assurance as the dying man and his family in the story with which we began. We **know** where we’ll be found. In Jesus’ name. Amen.