

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-5

Psalm 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

John 6:24-35

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In our second reading today, St. Paul has some advice for the Ephesians. He tells them to put aside their former way of life and the old self, which deteriorates through illusion and desire, and put on a fresh, spiritual way of thinking. Then each of them will be a new creation in God's image, whose justice and holiness are born of truth. Paul's words amount to a preview of what life will be like when the Kingdom of God finally comes -- when each of us will be a new creation, free to live life in its fullness.

But words, even the inspired words of Scripture, often do not fully convey to us the magnitude of a mystery like the Kingdom of God. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, instead of having the Kingdom of God described to us, we could actually experience it? If, just for a moment, the door to the Kingdom of Heaven could be thrown open, giving us a glimpse of eternal life? After an experience like that we could go back to our day to day lives refreshed, and filled with a new, profound conviction, that our final destination in Christ is well worth the hazards of the journey.

By the boundless generosity of God, an experience of the kind I have described *is* offered to us. Jesus speaks of it in our Gospel when he solemnly declares to the crowd, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." In

the Eucharist, the mystery of the Kingdom of God is revealed. Our destiny in Christ, the final reality, is present in the Eucharistic feast. I suppose, if we thought about it, we'd all agree that this is true of the Eucharist. But sometimes, I think, despite the best will in the world, our appreciation of the sacrament can be a bit dulled by familiarity.

I heard this story years ago, so some of the details are probably wrong. Soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, an American high school music teacher, who made a bit of extra money giving private piano lessons, decided to spend his summer on a walking tour of what was then still East Germany. One day, a couple of weeks into his holiday, he spent the morning looking through a rather shabby museum in a provincial town. He entered a room in the museum that contained but a single exhibit: a piano -- Beethoven's piano.

The music teacher was very excited by this discovery. He looked around the room, and saw that he was alone except for a single security guard. He walked up to the guard and said "I'll give you twenty dollars if you let me play Beethoven's piano." The guard had a family to feed, and didn't know how much longer he would have a job, so he agreed. The music teacher sat down before the instrument, and played a few chords. As he was playing, he said to the guard, "You know, this is a real privilege. I bet there isn't a pianist in the world who wouldn't like to do what I'm doing right now. The guard replied, "Vladimir Horowitz was given the opportunity, but he said he wasn't worthy..."

Perhaps this story says something relevant to our own appreciation of the Eucharist, in which Christ's passion and victory over death are made present to us. Like the piano teacher we can be blind to the magnitude of the privilege being accorded us. Greater men and women

than you and me have been moved to reverential awe by what we will experience in our parish churches today. But words, at least these words, are inadequate to describe such a mystery. So, it's best we set words aside, and share the Bread of Life.