

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:24-35

Read the Signs

St. Augustine writes, “You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Jesus says, “*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*” Yet isn’t perishable food that spoils precisely what we shove into that hole in our heart? The next gadget, the next outfit, the next sport’s season, the next date, the next car, the next whatever: we shove them all in hoping that they will fill that hole and make our lives complete, just to be left empty afterward, or at least not full. And the problem is not the gadget, the outfit, the sport’s season, the date, the car, the whatever, so long as we do not make them our idols. The problem is that we don’t understand the nature of that hole and of the Bread that alone can fill it. “You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” But where will we find Him? Where are the signs?

I know its hard to believe, but I’d never heard of a bratwurst nor seen a bratwurst until I went out to college with a bunch of Germans in the middle of a cornfield named New Ulm. Detroit was kielbasa territory. From the very first time I saw a bratwurst, I swore to myself I would never eat one. Surely if they were good for me, they would look good for me. To make a long story short, I fell for a German girl toward the end of my sojourn in the corn field. After duping her into thinking I was some sort of catch, she took me home to meet her parents in another cornfield, this one with a big plastic cow next to the town sign. Things were going great. I was doing all the things mom told me to do when you were a guest at someone’s house. But then we sat down for dinner, and guess what her mom came out with a plate full of? You guessed it: brats. So, what did I do? I ate brats like they were candy. No matter what they looked like, I knew what was best for my life, even if it was a truth that was hard to swallow.

Appearances were the problem in our text today. The Bread of Life did not look appealing. The people were sure they didn’t want it. This was not how they pictured Bread from Heaven. They wanted something that looked like it was good for them, something more like the manna with which their fathers had been fed by Moses. They had here-and-now eyes and dreams of an early conqueror, not a heavenly Victim. They didn’t know what was best for their life. The truth was too hard for them to swallow. But, try as they might to distract Him with seemingly deep theological queries, just as the Samaritan woman at the well had done two chapters earlier, Jesus wasn’t letting up. When they asked, “*What must we do to do the works God requires?*” He answered their question with what He had already said, “*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*”

“You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” And there He was, right in front of them, and they still wanted something else to shove into that hole. They wanted more perishable food. Their head bone may have been connected to the neck bone, but their ears were connected to their bellies.

And how often aren't we right there with them in Capernaum, bellies connected to ears, failing to read the signs He has given us, asking always more with them, "*What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?*"

Signs: we all want signs—more signs, better signs. We want so many signs that there is nothing of faith left. But more signs will not bring one more person to faith. As Abraham told the rich man in hell, when he wanted Abraham to send poor Lazarus to them from the dead to warn them about their unbelief, "*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them... If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*" I don't care if I found Noah's ark and set it in front of you together with Adam, Eve, Sts. Peter, Paul, and Mary, the twelve apostles and the seven dwarfs, not one more person would believe than will believe based on the signs already given. Jesus had already fed the five thousand. How could they ask for another sign?

And Jesus has fed us. Last week, we talked about the new and better meal we New Testament Christians have, which surpasses the meal Moses and the leaders ate when the covenant was confirmed, the Passover meal, and the feedings of the thousands. Here we meet the Lord face to face and receive the very treasure of heaven. And that is not all. We have the preached Word, where Jesus conscripts the mouth of a pastor to speak personally and lovingly to us, calling us from bread that spoils, from the rot of sin, to the Bread of God from Heaven, sent to us to bring us back to the Father with Him. How could we ask for another sign? We have our wedding at Cana, our healing of the official's son, the high priest's servant, and the sick man at the pool, our feeding of the five thousand, our walking on water, our blind man given sight, and our raising of Lazarus at the font, the pulpit, and the altar. Not enough? Well, He seems to think it's just what you need.

Some days you may be tired. Some days you may think you need the rest, that you are better served by your pillow than a preachment, an Absolution, a Supper. I know how you feel. There are days I am tired. There are days I put on my alb and stoles with less than reverence and joy. But we will not find the rest we need in that pillow. We will not find the Bread we need for real life in our cupboard or the grocery store. That rest is found here. That Bread is served here. That Rest and Bread is Christ, who stands before your face in the Sacrament and, through a divine call, in the weary face of a pastor, and pleads with you to stop shoving things in the hole in your heart that He was sent to fill.

"You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Stop working tirelessly to rest and listen. The work of God is not to work, but to believe, to trust the One whom God sent. And, by means of the gospel administered to you today, He is determined to work just that faith that believes in you, as a gift, not as a fruit of any labor of yours. Don't let appearances fool you. It may seem like the same old. It may seem like it won't taste very good. But this is the food that never spoils, that never gets old, that never is blah for the hungry and tired soul. This is the sweetest Bread of Heaven. It bears the Father's seal and guarantee. Savor it. Eat it with joy and gratitude. And rest, you weary and heavy-laden, for Jesus is here, and He is not only the Bread of Life who is living, but who makes alive (*Sacred Meditations*, p. 32). Amen.