

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We continue with the theme of being nourished by God, as this nourishment comes through Jesus. But not everyone sees God in Jesus, or sees God anywhere. One of the greatest of all religious questions we encounter is that of what we might call limited partial belief in God. That's what it seems to be at least on the surface. Polls are taken that try to measure and describe people's religious faith or belief. Never do they conclude that religious faith is universal. There are always some holdouts. We say that some "believe" and some don't. We might conclude by this judgment that some are nourished by God and some aren't. In a few cases this judgment of another's faith is extremely limited. To listen to some believers, it seems they conclude that heaven, or eternal life, is given to but a few, to those who are most like them. Furthermore, such religious elitism seems on the rise.

Our Catholic faith clearly holds that God wills the salvation of all people. God does not pick and choose. God loves everyone. God also invites everyone into a loving relationship with God's Spirit. How this happens is not obvious on the surface of things. One of the places where this variance of religious response is most felt is within the family where some believe and some don't. Or some practice faith and some seem not to. There are a thousand variations to this reality. When Jesus talked about the necessity of eating the bread that comes down from heaven, and we don't see people rushing to eat that bread, well, we are concerned.

A Gospel Word for the Home John 6:41-51

Today's Gospel reading has a wonderful description of God's way of doing things. It states that all will be taught by God. When talking about himself as the Bread of Life, Jesus notes that those who accept this remarkable truth have to be drawn to this belief by God. As Catholics we believe that Jesus truly is the bread or nourishment of our lives. We also believe that we who eat of his flesh (the Eucharist) will enjoy the fullness of eternal life with God. But we also wonder about those who don't. What is their fate? What is their relationship with God? Are they drawn into a relationship with God?

The answer to this question does not come from polls of religious involvement, although if such inquiry is done well, it is very helpful for understanding religious geography. But the polls don't have the last word. To remain faithful to our own religious Tradition, we have to be humble about this and say that we simply don't know. Such matters are God's and known only to God. Yet we can be consoled knowing that God's love is universal and that God will provide the nourishment that each person needs to be fully within the sphere of God's immense love.

Thought for the Week

Religious faith is no simple matter. Due to an informed understanding of what's happening around the world, we are acutely aware of religious pluralism. We also know it from experiences with our own families and neighborhoods. One challenge flowing from this situation is whether our care and concern for others should be limited by religious differences.

In today's Gospel reading we are lifted into a view that attempts to look at things as God does. We see God drawing all people to Jesus who is the Bread of Life for all. But we also know that many do not take that spiritual journey. They move along a variety of ways to God. In the end, we have to confess that much of this is wrapped in mystery. But that's not to be thought of as a loss. What would truly be a loss would be to narrow our perspective to a point where God's universal connection with all humanity is denied. Religious wars have been waged on this terrible misconception. Again, God is the God of all, loving everyone in ways we might not be able to grasp.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

All of Chapter Six in the Gospel according to John is about our being spiritually nourished. This chapter has been used to underscore the importance of participating in and receiving Christ in the Eucharist. But its range is wider than that religious act. It concerns all the ways we are fed by God on our personal religious journey. So how are you most nourished? There are many ways to be nourished by God's Spirit.

Let's mention a few: quiet prayerful walks, spiritual reading. There are many wonderful books being published these days.

Lectio divina or the prayerful reading of the Bible especially the Gospels, contemplative prayer, once thought of for only a few is now widely practiced. Additional ways include reception of the sacraments when accompanied by a good understanding of the rituals, and the study of theology. All of these activities take us out of our ordinary routine so that we can more fully enter into an understanding of the wondrous and mysterious workings of God, the topic we have been reflecting on this week. Parental survival definitely needs spiritual nourishment.

Car or Meal Talk

Besides the Eucharist, how is each of us fed by God?

One-Line Prayer

God the Holy Spirit, fill us with your love.
Amen.