

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 2, 2020 Cycle A

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Good and gracious God, you invite us to feast on your Word and to come to your table so that we can be nourished by you. May your Holy Spirit open our minds and hearts as we gather for this breaking open of your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The first and third readings speak of God feeding the hungers of his people. In the second reading, Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-3

Today's reading from Isaiah is an invitation to feast on God. There is no cost involved, no bargaining, and no exchange of money. God gives freely of his grace: water, a necessity of life. Wine and milk are signs of abundance and symbolize God's generosity. All who share at God's banquet table will be duly satisfied.

After 70 years of exile, some of the Israelite captives begin to grow accustomed to the Babylonian way of life. Some captives are supposedly spending their money for "what is not bread," and wages for "what fails to satisfy." Some are seeking life from sources other than the one God. Such searching will end in emptiness and futility. The promise of a fulfilled life and a land to live in had been God's promise to David hundreds of years earlier. This promise still remains for all captives who wish to open themselves to it again. All other promises end up leaving them still hungry and thirsty.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 145

This psalm highlights God's goodness, covenant, love and forgiveness, especially as seen in his providential care.

### SECOND READING: Romans 8:35, 37-39

These verses may be based upon Paul's own experience described in 2Corinthians 4:8-10: "We are

*in difficulties on all sides but never despair; we have been persecuted but never deserted; knocked down but never killed; always wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body."* Paul emphasizes the fact that suffering will be a constant threat for the believer, just as it was in the life of Christ. Such sufferings are not to be interpreted as punishment but as the cost of fidelity, which brings about a closer union with God.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 14:13-21

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### GOSPEL: Matthew 14:13-21

This miracle is told six times in the four Gospels. This underlines its importance in the life of the early church.

Only Matthew mentions that Jesus decides to go to a quiet place *after* he hears of the death of John the

Baptist. Jesus most likely has to be aware of what happens to those who ‘speak truth to power.’

But Jesus’ quiet time is interrupted by the crowds hungry for his teaching. Matthew tells us that when Jesus sees the large crowds, he feels compassion for them. Jesus’ need for solitude is overtaken by his care for the people. When Jesus’ disciples encourage him to let the people go so they can buy some food before the local deli closes (!☺), Jesus challenges *them* to give them something to eat. We can almost hear the disciples say, “You must be kidding, Master! How can we feed thousands of people?” Jesus goes on to feed the thousands with a few loaves and fish. Matthew, writing several decades later for mostly Jewish Christians, sees what Jesus did as a fulfillment of how God fed their ancestors in the desert. Also, for Matthew, this miracle points to the Eucharist. The gestures and words are like those used at the Last Supper: “He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.” The twelve leftover baskets point to the superabundance of what God offers us, his people.

### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

*The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.*

2. Isaiah asks: Why spend money on what will not satisfy? Obviously, we have to spend money on daily necessities, e.g., food and milk. In recent years, how, if any, have your spending habits changed?

3. In the second reading, St. Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of God. Yet in reality, we know things can leave people feeling separated from God’s love. What are some of those circumstances, and what can help us to continue feeling in the love of God when ‘the going gets tough’?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, “Give them something to eat yourselves.” How can we obey this command of Jesus when it comes to feeding the hungry of others on a spiritual and physical level?

5. What do you hunger for at this stage in your life?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

### RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Take time to reflect on what you hunger for and *how* to respond to it. Share spiritual and material food with the hungry.

**JOURNALING.** *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### PRAYING WITH THE WORD

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you alone are the bread that satisfies our deepest hungers. Help us to avoid feeding on breads that cannot satisfy.*

### CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

**Facilitator:** What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for all ministries and agencies involved with feeding the starving people of our world. Also pray for spiritual leaders who seek to feed the soul-hungers of people.

### CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus, at your last supper,  
you created a lovely way  
by which you can continue to feed our souls  
in a tangible manner.  
May we never lose our hunger  
for you in the Eucharist  
and may we be ready and willing to share  
our spiritual and material bread with others.  
Amen.*