

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

August 1, 2021

Exodus 16:2–4, 12–15 • Ephesians 4:17, 20–24 • John 6:24–35

### I.

Two weeks ago, I spent my vacation hiking Mt. Rogers, the highest peak in Virginia (5,728 feet).

Roughly speaking, the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area runs north to south along Interstate 81, from Wytheville to Abingdon, and from there extends eastward into the Blue Ridge Mountains.

What I noticed during my travels is that everybody was out: the highways, rest stops, hotels, and restaurants were all jammed with people.

### II.

We think of vacation as a respite from work—a break from the daily grind.

We work hard to save up money and accumulate time off so that we can then enjoy a period of rest and relaxation.

Hopefully, we return to work refreshed and rejuvenated.

Then there's another sense of work, which goes beyond the daily grind, and to which the daily grind contributes.

This work means something built, like a public works project.

This is something we build; it's the product of applying our gifts, talents, and knowledge.

We sometimes think of this as our "life's work" or legacy: for example, raising a family, or making a contribution to a given field of endeavor.

Related to both senses of work is sustenance, symbolized by bread.

So, we use the term “breadwinner”  
to designate the person whose income primarily provides for a family.

And we use the related expression of “putting food on the table.”

Work provides bread;  
and bread provides sustenance for work—  
strength to keep doing what is necessary.

### III.

Today’s Gospel features both concepts of work and bread.

The reading, and the ones we will hear for three Sundays during August,  
comes from the famous Bread of Life Discourse  
in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John.

In this section of John’s Gospel,  
Christ teaches us about the Eucharist:  
he is the Bread of Life.

The Bread of Life Discourse follows the multiplication of the loaves and fishes  
we heard last Sunday.

Today’s themes of work and bread emerge  
in the course of a convoluted back-and-forth Jesus and the crowd  
that follows him after the feeding of the five thousand.

First, the crowd misunderstands the miracle  
to have been about mere physical sustenance:

“Amen, amen, I say to you,  
you are looking for me not because you saw signs  
but because you ate the **loaves** and were filled.”

Christ urges them to think differently about work and bread:

“Do not **work** for **food** that perishes  
but for **food** that endures for eternal life,  
which the Son of Man will give you.”

This spiritual food—this different kind of “bread”—  
is nourishment for a more enduring work: eternal life.

So, the crowd asks how to go about this work:  
“What can we do to accomplish the **works** of God?”

Christ answers that this work is a commitment to his way of life:

“This is the **work** of God,  
that you believe in the one he sent.”

The conversation then pivots to the rationale for justifying this work.

The crowd’s request is a question about the kind of bread or sustenance  
necessary for this work,  
along the lines of the manna that sustained the Israelites  
during their sojourn to the promised land:

“What sign can you do, that we may see and **believe** in you? ...  
Our ancestors ate **manna** in the desert.”

Jesus answers that he himself will provide the sustenance  
necessary for God’s work, for the Christian way of life:

“I am the **bread** of life;  
whoever comes to me will never hunger,  
and whoever **believes** in me will never thirst.”

#### IV.

The Eucharist is the nourishment that God provides  
for us to live as disciples of Christ.

The Eucharist is Jesus Christ himself:  
the sacrifice of his death and resurrection continually renewed in the Mass,  
and his enduring Real Presence in the bread and wine consecrated at Mass.

The Eucharist is a participation in God’s own life,  
which empowers us to live like Christ,  
to carry out the mission inscribed on the façade of this cathedral church:  
IF YE LOVE ME KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS (John 14:15).

The Eucharist is both nourishment to do God's work  
and God's work itself given to us.

What a great encouragement:  
God doesn't just command things;  
he gives us the power—his own life—to carry them out.

The Second Vatican Council taught that the worship of the Church—  
above all the Eucharist—  
is the “source and summit” of the Church's work or activity  
(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10).

The Eucharist is the entire person and the complete redemptive work of Christ:  
crucified, died, risen, and ascended.

In the nave, where you are seated,  
there are eight beautiful stained-glass windows that depict the work of Christ.

One of them—“The Eucharist”—encapsulates the other seven:  
“The Incarnation,” “The Nativity,” “Jesus in the Temple,”  
“The Marriage in Cana,” “The Power of the Keys,” “The Crucifixion,”  
and “The Resurrection.”

The Eucharist is the Bread of Life:  
Jesus' saving work—his eternal legacy—given to us as food,  
which nourishes us to follow him.

This is why we are obliged to attend Mass each Sunday  
and holy day of obligation—because it's so important.

That is why we participate fully in the Mass—  
singing, making the responses clearly, listening attentively, and keeping silence—  
all in order to be strengthened by the Eucharist.

And this is why we receive the Sacred Body of Christ—Jesus himself—  
with the utmost reverence, devotion, and care.

This is the Bread of Life—  
sustenance for our life's work as followers of Jesus Christ.