

# Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2024, Pentecost 11

Readings: 2Samuel 11: 26 – 12:13a

**Psalm 51:1-12**

**Ephesians 4:1-16**

**John 6:24-35**

I remember that when I was a kid my Dad got really sick. He had to have an operation and it wasn't clear whether he was going to survive. My mum took my brother and I in to see him at the hospital and we did what most boys do - we pushed every button on the bed to see what they would do. Up and down was OK; head and shoulders slowly upright also went OK, maybe, there were signs of discomfort that we ignored! For when we pushed another button, my incredibly patient Dad told us firmly, to 'Get out!'

After the visit, I remember Mum being pretty teary in the car, which indicated that whatever Dad was about to go through was a big deal. I remember the medical diagnosis clearly because it had seven syllables, and because this diagnosis was threatening the life of the man who was at the centre of my life, and the heart of our family. After we got home, I remember going outside to the back fence, and bawling my eyes out. I pressed my forehead against the rough timber, which smelt of creosote – and begged God to let Dad be OK. The smell of creosote always takes me back to that moment in time when I was a boy – and to that prayer.

I reckon we've all been there at some stage, one way or another. The wheels have fallen off our life – or, the life of someone we love – and we're praying with tears for a miracle. As an adult we might even try bargaining with God by praying like this: *'I haven't been in touch for a while – and I'm sorry about that – but I would really love for you to fix this, or make this thing possible. If you do this, I will pray more! I will be a better person! I will even join a monastery if that's what is needed! In fact, I'll do whatever it takes... just please, please do this thing!'*

The crowd described in this week's Gospel are like this, and I think it's reassuring to recognise something of our own thinking in their request to Jesus for a sign, so they could see and believe. Remember the question came after the experience of five thousand men, and who knows how many other people, being miraculously fed. So, the inference seems to be that crowd was saying: give us another sign... and we'll believe, at least for a while. Like the boy at the fence praying for his Dad all those years ago praying – '...make him well, and I'll do anything you want me to!'

However, Jesus didn't cave in to the request of the crowd. They had already witnessed people being physically healed – but they wanted to see more. They had already been physically fed with bread and fish – but they wanted to see more. Instead, Jesus talked about God satisfying much deeper hungers through him. The deeper hunger to belong; the deeper hunger to be loved; and the deeper hunger to have a sense of purpose.

Jesus said to the crowd then, and says to us now, *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”* It is a profound statement of identity, that is worth chewing over, and thinking about. When Jesus used the phrase *‘I am’* there was a clear echo of God talking to Moses at the burning bush described in the book of Exodus. For when Moses asked who was sending him back to Egypt, Moses heard God saying, *‘Tell them I Am has sent me’*. So, there is something rich here to reframe and unpack— for when Jesus said, *‘I am the Bread of Life’* there is a sense of him saying, *‘God is the bread of life’* and, *‘I am God.’*

As we consider this, I think it’s worth bearing in mind what we do with physical bread – whether it has gluten or it doesn’t have glute

We mix up flour with other ingredients, we let it sit for a while, we bake it, and then we eat it. Imagine the smell of baking bread – now that is a better smell than creosote! As the bread is broken down in our gut and digested, it gives us energy for our physical lives. It feeds our cells, and some of the atoms, which used to be part of the bread, become physically part of who we are.

So, Jesus seems to be saying in this conversation with the crowd, *‘I’m not here to perform miracles for you. I’m here, to become an intrinsic part of who you are. I want you to ingest and digest me! I want to give you spiritual energy, & fundamentally... become part of who you are’*.

This has potential for the way we think about silent prayer – as we breathe in deeply and slowly – as we become conscious of each heartbeat – as we quiet our mind and centre in Christ – we are being spiritually fed. As we read through a Bible reading – seeking guidance and insight – we are being spiritually fed.

I think the today’s Psalm is a fantastic way to begin prayer because it affirms that we are each works in progress and have need of God. There is a humility in the verses of this Psalm that is much needed in Christian living. In no way do the verses say – *I am fantastic, please make me better!* Instead, they acknowledge that within each of us there is an inclination to be selfish, and an inclination towards behaviour. Verse ten in particular gives helpful focus, and I invite you to join me in offering this verse as part of your prayer each morning during this week trusting that we will be spiritually fed: *‘Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right Spirit within me.’*

Would you please join me in prayer:

Holy God, we give thanks for the many ways you nourish and nurture us in life and faith. Through your Spirit feed us each day, that we may know your peace and purpose, and in your mercy be a blessing to those we share our lives with. We pray in the name of the one who shows us the way, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

