



Saturday 1st week in Lent

Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.

Then they said to him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent.' So they said, 'What sign will you yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus answered them:

In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.'

Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst. But, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me; I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to me, because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. It is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and that I should raise that person up on the last day.

John 6:27-40

Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life

There now takes place a dialogue that explores the meaning of the eucharist. The conversation is not with Jesus' opponents but within the community of followers. John's thoughts as he wrote would have been on the people in his own community. It is to them that these words were addressed. The basic problem is that they did not recognise the extraordinary nature of what took place in the eucharist. They thought only on the physical plane. The eucharistic liturgy was just a set of outward, human words and actions. In contrast, John tells them, the eucharistic bread is the food that gives them eternal life, food given by God. This is too abstract for the people, who are triggered into questions designed to sidetrack the argument into something concrete and graspable. Jesus refuses to be sidetracked and restates the affirmation. The people's response is ambiguous. It could mean that they grasp Jesus' meaning so that he can now expound more deeply: or they could be expressing a shallow understanding that saw the offer as 'something for nothing'.

Whatever John meant to convey, the dialogue proceeds to the great statement, *I am the bread of life* – and John would have had the eucharistic bread in mind when he wrote these words.