

The Gospel reading this week is the second of five Sundays on the *Sixth Chapter of John*, the chapter on the Bread of Life. The Church presents every three years. Why? All so we can have a deeper insight and appreciation for the Eucharist. The *Gospel of John* was completed the last decade of the first century. By then, the Church had a clear way of putting into words the miracle of the Eucharist.

Last Sunday's Gospel from the beginning of chapter 6 presented the miracle of the loaves and fish with a special slant added by John's community. The multiplication took place as the Passover approached. This pointed to another Passover when Jesus would also provide bread, His very Body and Blood, the Bread of Heaven. It also noted that different from the unused manna which would be destroyed, the fragments of unused bread were to be gathered up. This is the biblical basis for the care of the Eucharist so that it might be brought to the sick and worshiped in our tabernacles.

In today's reading Jesus spoke to people who came looking for Him. This took place the day after the multiplication. Jesus had sent his disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee by boat. Later that night He joined them on that boat, walking on the water. When the people who had eaten the loaves and fish went looking for Jesus, they heard that his disciples had gotten into a boat, but that Jesus wasn't with them. That's why they were shocked when they searched everywhere for him and then learned that he was on the other side of the water. They asked, "Rabbi, how did you get here." He didn't answer their question. Instead he addressed the reason why they were looking for him: they were looking for another free meal. He tells them to seek Bread that will last forever, the Bread He will give.

We, you and I, spend a lot of energy seeking various things that we want. But do we spend enough energy seeking that which we need?

We need Jesus Christ. He is the joy of our lives. He is the One who gives meaning to life. He is the Truth. We need Him

John 6 points to our need for the Lord in the Eucharist. Recently, I've heard about some people who had been active in Life Teen or in other high school youth programs who in college or after college have left the Catholic faith to join a nondenominational church. They say the music is great, they feel the presence of the Lord, and there is less talk about morality. Perhaps they had not been as active in the faith as they should have been when they went to college. Maybe they met someone who encouraged them to join them in a non-Catholic worship. Or, maybe, they did not want to be challenged to live a Catholic life-style.

It is wonderful that people worship the Lord in so many different churches. It is wonderful that you can look through the Baltimore and Perry Point area and see so many churches of so many denominations. God bless them all and may they continue

to praise God and do his work. But for a Catholic to leave the Catholic Church, would be leaving the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. Some people will say that this or that Church have communion services; so they have not left the Eucharist. Actually, they have. The various denominations with communion services do not view the bread and wine as the real presence of the Lord. If they did, they would not destroy whatever is left over after their service. Or, as a priest friend of mine puts it, "They begin the service with bread and wine and leave the service with bread and wine." That is why they do not have tabernacles. For a Catholic to leave the Church and be satisfied with non-Catholic communion rites would be turning from a truth that they have been given.

Similarly, the worship and lives of devoted Jews is wonderful, but for a Christian to leave Christianity to become Jewish would be to leave the truth of Jesus Christ he or she has been given.

One lady told me that she was no longer Catholic, but she had not left Jesus. Actually, she has left the Lord's presence in the Eucharist. As a Catholic she was given the special presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. She was allowed into the mystery of having Jesus Christ's Body and Blood within her. She has left the Eucharist, the Food that the Heavenly Father has given. Every sincere non Catholic Christian would agree that if a person truly believes in the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, that Catholic cannot leave the Church.

Some non-Catholics have a communion service, but these Churches do not believe that the bread and wine has been transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is why left over bread is discarded after the service. Yes, their communion service symbolizes the union of the Christian community with Christ, but for them the bread itself is not Christ. Some Catholics attend these services and think that they are receiving communion just as they do in the Catholic Church. They are not. What they are doing as Catholics is rejecting the special gift we celebrate every time we receive communion.

We celebrate the Eucharist and have a deep encounter with Christ at Mass and at the reception of communion. We also have a deep encounter with the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord in our Services of Eucharistic Adoration, be they the ones that we in Life Teen refer to as XLT, or benediction services, or other times that the Eucharist is adored. All Catholic Parishes celebrate Eucharistic Adoration in some form or other. All Catholic Churches have times that the Blessed Sacrament is exposed all day for adoration, just as we do here on First Fridays, on Thursday after the 9:00 am Mass, and during Forty Hours at the beginning of Lent.

And we value the gift of the Eucharist. For centuries, Catholics have embraced death rather than give up their devotion to the Eucharist. Priests and lay people were routinely tortured to death in England for the crime of celebrating Mass or receiving communion.

Towards the end of his life, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was asked who was the greatest influence on his life. To everyone's surprise he said two young women, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and Little Li, the Eucharistic martyr of China. Li lived at the time the Communists overtook China, the early 1950's. One day the Communist police made a sweep of Li's village, and crammed all the inhabitants into the tiny Church. The Inspector ridiculed their beliefs. He told them they were tricked into believing that God is present in the tabernacle. The people watched with disbelief, as with a thundering voice, he ordered the soldiers to fire at the tabernacle. He grabbed the ciborium and threw all the Sacred Hosts onto the tile floor. "Now get out!" the inspector yelled. "And woe to anyone who returns to this den of superstition! He'll answer to me!" Before they left, the Communists locked the priest in the large coal bunker in the church, where a small opening helped him to see through to the sanctuary where the Hosts lay strewn on the floor. He was shocked to see that the next day, Little Li snuck by a sleeping guard and came into the Church. She found one of the hosts on the floor and knelt in adoration before it for an hour. Then she bowed over it and took it into her mouth. She did the same the next day, and the day after that. The priest knew that there had been 32 hosts in the tabernacle, and sure enough every day for 32 days, Little Li snuck into the Church, knelt before the presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament for an hour and bent down to receive Communion. But on the 32nd day, the guard changed his routine and inspected the Church while Li was there. Seeing her he beat her and then shot her, making her China's little martyr for the Eucharist.

Like Li we treasure the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord. We pray today that we might have a greater understanding of the marvelous gift of the Eucharist. We pray today that we might grow so strong in our love for the Eucharist that the thought of leaving the Blessed Sacrament for any reason would be unfathomable.

We Catholics have been given a great gift. But with that gift comes the responsibility to reverence the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ. May we all remain faithful to the Bread of Life.

II

There is a bit of Jewish humor that goes like this: An old man goes to a diner every day for lunch. He always orders the soup du jour. One day the manager asks him how he liked his meal. The old man replies, "It was good, but you could give a little more bread. Two slices of bread is not enough." So the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him four slices of bread. "How was your meal, sir?" the manager asks. "It was good, but you could give a little more bread," comes the reply. So the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him eight slices of bread. "How was your meal today, sir?" the manager asks. "Good, but you could give a little more bread," comes the reply. So . . . the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him a whole loaf of bread, 16 slices with his soup. "How was your meal, sir?" the manager asks, when he comes to pay. "It was good, but you could give just a little more bread," comes the reply once again.

The manager is now obsessed with seeing this customer satisfied with his meal, so he goes to the bakery, and orders a six-foot-long loaf of bread. When the man comes in as usual the next day, the waitress and the manager cut the loaf in half, butter the entire length of each half, and lay it out along the counter, right next to his bowl of soup. The old man sits down, and devours both his bowl of soup, and both halves of the six-foot-long loaf of bread. The manager now thinks he will get the answer he is looking for, and when the old man comes up to pay for his meal, the manager asks in the usual way: "How was your meal TODAY, sir?" The old man replies: "It was good as usual, but I see you are back to serving only two slices of bread!"

Well, sometime this week you will make a trip to the grocery store to get a loaf of bread. It will be readily available on the shelf. There will be quite a variety to choose from. You will pay little attention to the price, not realizing that the packaging that the bread is wrapped in actually costs more than the wheat that is in the bread. All in all, you will think it a very uneventful trip, but you will be wrong.

It is quite difficult for us, as Americans, to understand the importance of bread unless we turn on our TV and watch what is going on in so many parts of the world today. When there is no staff of life there is suffering and famine. A simple loaf of bread: Something, which we do not give a second thought, but in certain parts of the world it means life itself.

It is only as we comprehend that situation that we really begin to understand the importance of bread not only now but also in the time of Jesus. Just think for a moment how so many significant theological events in the Bible revolve around the subject of bread. The most important event in the Old Testament of course, was the Exodus event--the trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. But what caused the Hebrews to be in Egypt in the first place? It was for want of bread you will recall. The wheat crop had failed due to draught, and the Hebrews had migrated to the land of the Pharaoh because there was a surplus in storage there. It was bread, or the lack of it, that initiated this whole chain of events.

Later, when the Jews were on their way to the Promised Land, and they were facing starvation in the bleak wilderness, God rained down bread from heaven, as it was called, in the form of manna.

When Jesus began his ministry, he went into the desert where he was tempted. As the hot sun braced down upon him, he looked out with sweaty eyes at the round white rocks, and we are told that they took on the appearance of loaves of bread. Satan was tempting Jesus to give bread to the people and end the suffering of world hunger. Yet, Jesus spurned that temptation because, he said, that man cannot live by bread alone.

One day Jesus was praying by the roadside when the disciples walked up and saw him. They were so impressed by the genuineness of his prayer that they implored him: Master, teach us how to pray. It was in the midst of the Master's prayer that he reminds us of the importance of the staff of life. He prayed: Give us this day our daily bread.

Perhaps supremely we remember bread, because it was on the night that Jesus was betrayed that he met with his disciples in that event that we now call the Last Supper. As he did so, he took a loaf of bread and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: This is my body, which is broken for you. You simply cannot escape the significance of bread throughout the length and breath of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Which brings us to the story this morning. It begins with that event known as the feeding of the 5000. A small boy is brought to Jesus with five barely loaves and from that meager supply of bread Jesus is able to feed the vast multitude that had assembled. After this event Jesus goes into his teaching but there is an issue. His miracle has generated controversy.

Quite impressed with what they have seen, a group of scribes approach Jesus and say, in effect, if you are the Messiah prove it. They pointed out that when the Hebrews were in the wilderness Moses was able to bring bread from heaven (6:30). Since that time there had been a strong rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he, too, would bring manna from heaven. This had been the superman act of Moses and surely, they reasoned, the Messiah could surpass that. In other words, the Jews were challenging Jesus to substantiate his claim of Messiahship by raining bread from heaven.

Some might immediately say, well, was not the feeding of the 5000 a miracle in their eyes? Yes and no. They were impressed--no doubt about that--but, you see, Jesus' critics argue that he merely fed 5000 whereas Moses had fed a nation. Jesus, they said, you have fed these people for one day but Moses did it for 40 years. What you have done is multiply a few earthly loaves of bread and fish but Moses made it appear from out of nowhere.

The messiah, it was thought at the time, would out perform the signs of Moses. He who was to come would do the superior work.

Jesus meets these expectations by saying that they had misinterpreted the Moses event. First of all, he reminded them that the bread had not come from Moses but from God. They were putting the emphasis in the wrong place. Moses was the facilitator, but not the originator. Secondly, said Jesus, they failed to see that the real bread from heaven was not manna at all. That was only meant to be a symbol of the true bread. The real bread from heaven comes down and feeds not only man's physical needs but also his spiritual hunger as well. It was at this point, and don't miss the significance of this, Jesus said: "I am the

bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst.”

I

Bread is central to the major stories of the bible and plays a significant role in life but we must understand first that to satisfy our hunger for heaven we cannot eat the bread of earth. I think that it is obvious. Jesus was saying that they were putting too much emphasis on physical bread. That is not to say that it is insignificant. Don't misunderstand him. Supplying physical needs is important.

What Jesus is saying here is—there is a deeper aspect to this whole issue? Let's take a look: 200 years before Jesus arrived on the scene, the Roman Emperor Aurelian initiated something called the “bread dole.” This meant that grain could be supplied to the poor for half price. The dole quickly became a political tool to be used by tribunes to buy voters. If Jesus were not careful, this whole thing of giving bread could quickly degenerate into a tool to win friends and influence people. He would become as just another demagogue—just another politician.

The point here is this: Bread can be used as a weapon. In the past, there are those in our own government, democrat and republican, that have advocated that very thing. If nations withhold oil from us, then we withhold bread from them. On the surface feeding the world's hungry sounds like such an ideal thing, but when this whole issue is examined it becomes much more complex.

In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, we read a fictionalized scene that takes place between an old church cardinal who is engaged in the Spanish Inquisition and Jesus, who supposedly has now come back to earth. The crooked old cardinal chastises Jesus for missing his golden opportunity in the desert when he did not give bread to the people. “Mankind would have run after you, grateful and obedient, though forever trembling with fear that you might withdraw your hand and they would no longer have loaves. You did not want to make men slaves but here too your judgment was too high for all men are slaves.”

I have always thought that the temptation to give bread to the world was the greatest that Jesus ever experienced, because I am certain that his great compassionate heart melted at the sight of those who were hungry, so many of whom were children. With the snap of a finger it could have been done. But Jesus understood the ramifications of this and did what he had to do by refusing to fall into that tempting trap.

II

Yes, bread plays a significant role in every country and in every life but we must understand second that to satisfy our hunger for heaven we must eat the bread of heaven. Jesus was saying: While life in its most elementary form depends upon bread, bread only sustains life, it does not make life what God intended it to be.

Bread has power but in the end its power will fail. Bread can buy you land but not love; it can buy you bonds but not brotherhood; gold but not gladness; silver but not sincerity; hospitals but not health; 3 karats but not character; houses but not homes. You can trade bread for commodities but not comfort, real estate but not righteousness, hotels but not heaven.

To satisfy your hunger for heaven you cannot eat the bread of earth, you must eat the bread of God. That bread is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

The crowd said to Jesus: Give us the bread from heaven. Do what Moses did and we will be satisfied. But Jesus is saying: I am the bread from heaven. He who comes after me will never hunger. As bread nourishes us physically, so Jesus nourishes us spiritually.

As the proud father of a 8-year-old daughter and a 1 year old son, we provide them with all the physical needs that they could have. We feed them, we cloth them, we give them warm bed, and I, have become fairly proficient in changing diapers. But more and more I discover that their needs go so much deeper than those physical needs. She wants to be loved and held. He wants to play. She has a desire for knowledge. He hungers after new experiences. In short, they desire quality of life and not mere existence. That is what Jesus Christ ultimately provides for us--quality of life--a way to get beyond ourselves and mere existence and experience life and an intensity of life that we have never before experienced.

Let us this day partake of that food which does not parish. Let us partake of the bread that is not here today and gone tomorrow. Let us partake of the staff of life, which nourishes us for all of eternity. To satisfy your hunger for heaven you cannot eat the bread of earth. To satisfy your hunger for heaven you must eat the bread of heaven. What is this bread? It is Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the bread of life—now and forever more. Amen.

ChristianGlobe Network, Inc. | [I Am The Bread Of Life](#), by Brett Blair

III

It is not easy being a father. One cynic, speaking from his own experience, noted that children go through four fascinating stages. First they call you DaDa. Then they call you Daddy. As they mature they call you Dad. Finally they call you collect.

The most common image that Jesus used in describing God was that of "Father." It makes me think that Joseph must have been a very special kind of father. We center much of our attention on his mother, Mary, but Joseph must have also combined those very special qualities of strength and gentleness that we associate with Jesus. Jesus had a very keen knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the Jewish home it was the father who had the primary responsibility for his son's religious instruction. Of course we know that Jesus had an unique relationship with God. Still, I have to believe that Joseph, though barely mentioned in the Gospel narrative, was probably an influential role model for Jesus. Why else would Jesus have chosen the imagery of "Father" to portray God?

Dads don't have it as easy as they used to, perhaps. But how important Christian fathers are! A study of church attendance sometime back showed that if both Mom and Dad attended church regularly 72 percent of their children remain faithful to the church. If only Mom attended regularly, only 15 percent remained faithful. So the church is thankful for Christian fathers. And so are Christian mothers, needless to say. The number of young women having to raise children in a single parent household nowadays is startling. Of course, it is not always the mother who is raising the children. Again, we can be thankful for Christian fathers who take on their share of responsibility for nurturing their young. So if you are here maybe your father had something to do with it.

In 1969, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, a group of people was preparing to have a "hurricane party" in the face of a storm named Camille. Police chief Jerry Peralta pulled up sometime after dark at the posh Richelieu Apartments. Facing the beach less than 250 feet from the surf, the apartments were directly in the line of danger.

A man with a drink in his hand came out to the second-floor balcony and waved at the police chief. Peralta yelled up, "You all need to clear out of here as quickly as you can. The storm's getting worse." But as other party participants joined the man on the balcony, they just laughed at Peralta's order to leave. "This is my land," one of them yelled back. "If you want me off, you'll have to arrest me."

Peralta didn't arrest anyone, but he wasn't able to persuade them to leave either. He wrote down the names of the next of kin of the twenty or so people who gathered there to party through the storm. They laughed as he took their names. They had been warned, but they had no intention of leaving.

It was 10:15 p.m. when the front wall of the storm came ashore. Scientists clocked Camille's wind speed at more than 205 miles-per-hour, the strongest on record and much, much stronger than

Hurricane Katrina that did so much destruction to the Gulf Coast last summer. Raindrops hit with the force of bullets, and waves off the Gulf Coast crested between twenty-two and twenty-eight feet high.

News reports later showed that the worst damage came at the little settlement of motels, go-go bars, and gambling houses known as Pass Christian, where some twenty people were killed at a hurricane party in the Richelieu Apartments. Nothing was left of that three-story structure but the foundation. Of the two dozen people in the building, only one survived. (1)

Storms come. Sometimes they come suddenly and violently. Sometimes they tear your world apart.

Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over their boat, nearly swamping it. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. And he said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were now more terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Storms come. They may not come in the form of a sudden, furious squall, or a hurricane. Sometimes they come in the form of a phone call--from a doctor confirming a diagnosis, from a police officer telling you of an automobile accident. Storms come in many forms--a note from a spouse saying she's leaving, a pink slip from an employer. Storms come. Just as they came to those disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

Here's what's frustrating: Sometimes when storms come, it seems as if God is asleep. "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" asked his terrified disciples. And sometimes when we are going through a crisis, it does seem that either God doesn't hear or doesn't care.

You may remember Robert Browning's famous poem:

The lark's on the wing, God's in his heaven, All's right with the world.

The snail's on the thorn;

Browning wrote those words in the mid-Nineteenth century, an era of boundless optimism. But after two world wars, the Holocaust, and numerous genocides, as well as the terrible specter of international terrorism, few people would now dare to say, "All's right with the world." Worse,

as author Philip Yancey notes, "God seems to stay in his heaven despite all that's wrong with the world. Why doesn't He do something?" (2)

A Romanian man filed a lawsuit last fall against God for allegedly fouling up his life. The suit states that the man was promised a good life in return for "various goods and prayers," and that the

20-year sentence he's currently serving in a Romanian jail represents a clear breach of contract. (3)

That's absurd, of course, but have you ever felt like suing God? Be honest now. Sometimes terrifying storms come up in our lives and we turn to God and all we find is an awful silence. And we cry out with those disciples of old, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

In our text for today, Christ does stir from his slumber. He rebukes the wind and says to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" When the wind dies down and is completely calm, he turns to his disciples and asks, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" I believe this is the crux of the lesson. We know that storms come. We believe that Christ has the power to calm the storms. Why are we afraid to trust God's promises?

Christ knew that his disciples were human beings, given to fear. He knew that they were still growing in their faith. His retort to them sounds harsh, but it is the harshness of a coach who wants his players to get the routine down precisely so that when they are tested they will be able to respond as they were coached. Jesus wants to help us with our fear--for a greater tragedy than the storms that come in our lives is the inadequacy of the response that we make to those storms. Let me make some brief suggestions about how we can cope with life in the midst of life's storms.

First of all, prepare for them. That makes sense, doesn't it? If we know storms are going to come, don't you think we ought to prepare for them? A TV news camera crew was on assignment in southern Florida filming the widespread destruction from Hurricane Andrew. In one scene, amid the devastation and debris, stood one house on its foundation. The owner was cleaning up the yard when a reporter approached him. "Sir, why is your house the only one in the entire neighborhood that is standing?" asked the reporter. "How did you manage to escape the severe damage of the hurricane?"

"I built this house myself," the man replied. "I also built it according to the Florida state building code. When the code called for two-by-six roof trusses, I used two-by-six roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane. I did and it did. I suppose no one else around here followed the code." (4)

That man was prepared. But suppose that storm had been cancer or the loss of a child or some great tragedy, how could he have prepared? There are many ways.

HE COULD HAVE MADE SURE HIS RELATIONSHIPS WERE STRONG. His family relationships, his relationships with his friends. It helps when you are going through a storm to have others there with you. You may not be blessed with a family, but you can build your relationships here in the church so that you will have people who will serve as your support group. Ask someone who has gone through the storm of an illness or the loss of a loved one whether close relationships made a difference. They do.

He could have also prepared himself for the storm physically, mentally, spiritually. For example, does your general health make a difference in a storm? How well you've taken care of yourself can make a significant difference when you are struck by a catastrophic illness. We don't talk about this much at church, but maybe we ought to. A person undergoing surgery or chemotherapy or radiation will generally do better if his or her overall health is good. Being in good physical condition is also a good way to deal with the depression that inevitably comes with a terrible loss. Prepare for life's storms by keeping yourself fit. Don't wait until the storm comes.

Mentally and spiritually we prepare ourselves by building our lives on the Rock. There comes a time in our lives when we decide what we believe and how we will live. "I will live according to God's building code," we decide. "I will live a life of quality, trusting God's promises." There are other ways to live that might bring us more sensual gratification and less sacrifice, but we believe that our lives have purpose and meaning, that a loving Creator has intended our lives for something more than mere animal satisfactions. And so we seek to live our lives according to God's code so that, when the storms of life come, we respond reflexively with faith and not fear, just as a well-trained athlete responds in the contest as he or she has been coached. This is not to say that we cease being human. We still may go through all the steps associated with grief and loss--denial, anger, rejection, guilt, bargaining, depression/confusion, and acceptance. But we go through the process without being overwhelmed.

And then, eventually, when the storm has run its course, as all storms do, we see how God has guided us through. We had despaired at times that we could possibly make it, but we do make it and we give God the glory. And, if we are wise, we reflect on the lessons we have learned from this experience. For this is the purpose of storms--to produce growth.

Robert A. Schuller tells about a farmer in Washington who was especially proud of the apples he produced every year, and with good reason. His farm was at a high elevation, and the cold winds that came through there made his apples especially crisp and flavorful. Every year, after he harvested his crop, he would polish those apples until they virtually shone. Then he would put them into beautiful packages to show them off. These weren't your ordinary run-of-the-mill apples but the kind that made beautiful gifts to send loved ones for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As word of his marvelous apples spread, it got to the point where he was inundated with orders even before he had harvested the fruit.

One year, just before harvest time, a severe hailstorm pummeled his property. When it was all over, there wasn't a single apple without blemishes on its skin. There was nothing wrong with

the apples. They just didn't look as pretty as they usually did, and the farmer was afraid that the people who had ordered them might be disappointed and ask for their money back.

Then he had an idea. He took all of the apples with the little blemishes on the outside and wrapped every one of them the same way he did every year. He put them in the same kind of packages. Then he added a note. It read: "Notice these high-quality apples. This year represents the finest crop. You can see the blemishes caused by the hailstorm, which created the extreme cold giving the ultimate flavor and ultimate crispness to these apples."

Well, not a single order was returned. In fact, just the opposite happened. The following year when his orders started coming in he had many requests from people who wanted to make sure they got the apples with the blemishes this year, too! (5)

That's the way it works for people of faith. We don't escape the blemishes. We wear them proudly, for we could not be who we are today without the growth that those blemishes brought with them.

Storms come. Some of you are young. It seems like you will live forever. That's wonderful, but if you are smart, you will prepare yourself for that time when life sends us the unexpected squall. Prepare yourself by building strong relationships. Prepare yourself by keeping yourself fit physically, mentally and spiritually. Decide to build your life on the rock of faith.

Rabbi Jan Goldstein recalls one unexpected benefit from the 1994 earthquake that rocked Los Angeles. The disaster caused massive power outages all over the city. But, for the first time in years, Goldstein saw his neighbors wander outside at night and gaze at the stars. Usually, the artificial lights that powered the city blocked out most views of the night sky. In Goldstein's experience, few Angelenos had the opportunity before this earthquake and the subsequent power outage to appreciate the beauty of the stars. (6)

I wonder if something like that didn't happen that night to the disciples. After the Master had calmed the storm, there was a great calm. But the wind from the storm had cleared the air in a wonderful way and, as they gazed at the heavens, they could see the stars as they had never seen them before. And they reflected on this man who had power over the wind and the waves. And they learned the meaning of a life built on God.

1. Christian Values Quarterly, Spring/Summer 1994, p. 10.

2. Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

3. *The Week*, October 28, 2005, p. 8.

4. Leadership 14, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 49. Steve Farrar, Standing Tall (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 2001).
5. Dump Your Hang-ups (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993).
6. Jan Goldstein, Life Can Be This Good (Berkeley, CA.: Conari Press, 2002), p. 96.

IV

The wonderful writer Max Lucado tells about a time his wife Denalyn called as he was driving home. "Can you stop at the grocery store," she asked, "and pick up some bread?"

"Of course," he said.

"Do I need to tell you where to find it?" she asked.

"Are you kidding?" Max asked. "I was born with a bread-aisle tracking system." Like a knowing wife, Denalyn said, "Just stay focused, Max."

"She was nervous," says Lucado. "Rightly so. I am the Exxon Valdez of grocery shopping. My mom once sent me to buy butter and milk; I bought buttermilk. I mistook a tube of hair cream for toothpaste . . . I am a charter member of the Clueless Husband Shopping Squad. I can relate to the fellow who came home from the grocery store with one carton of eggs, two sacks of flour, three boxes of cake mix, four sacks of sugar and five cans of cake frosting. His wife looked at the sacks of groceries and lamented, 'I never should have numbered the list.'"

Knowing that Denalyn was counting on him to carry out this simple task, Lucado parked the car at the market and entered the door. En route to the bread aisle, he spotted his favorite cereal, so he picked up a box, which made him wonder if they needed milk. He found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God's great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. As Lucado put it, "The heavenly banquet will consist of tables and tables of Oreo cookies and milk. We will spend eternity dipping and slurping our way through . . ." He doesn't finish the thought, but you get the idea.

He grabbed a pack of Oreos, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is, he thought, cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, he spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes he'd filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. He checked out and drove home.

His wife Denalyn looked at his purchases, then at him. Can you guess her question? It's an obvious one, isn't it? "Where's the bread?"

He went back to the grocery store. He forgot the one thing he went to get. The one essential product. He forgot the bread. (1)

Last week we dealt with the feeding of the 5,000. At the end of the story, the crowd is so excited about Jesus that they want to crown him King. This, of course, was not the purpose for which he was sent. So he withdrew to a nearby mountain. Today's lesson occurs just a little while later.

John tells us that, once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there at the site where he fed the multitudes, they got into boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Remember how we said last week that John always uses the word "sign" instead of miracle when he was describing the wondrous things that Jesus did. John sees these signs as evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. The feeding of the 5,000 with the fishes and the loaves is a sign pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus says to the crowd, "You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill . . ." In other words, Jesus is trying to point them toward a spiritual reality rather than a physical one. All they are interested in is having their bellies full.

This was obviously frustrating to Jesus. From verse 32 on Jesus tries to correct the crowd's perception of what just happened in the feeding of the 5,000. He wants to point them back to God. He begins with the manna given in the wilderness to the children of Israel, one of the watershed events of their life as a people.

For many Jews, Moses was the greatest of all the prophets. It was he who gave the Israelites manna. Jesus corrected their perception of that event in three ways: First, he reminded them it was God, not Moses, who provided the manna. Two, he wanted them to see that God is still giving manna now, not just in the past. And finally, he tried to make them understand that he, Jesus, is the true Bread from Heaven. Manna was food for the body, but Jesus is God's full provision for the soul. Jesus himself is the Bread of God.

The crowd didn't understand what he was talking about. Just like the woman at the well who didn't understand about the water that Jesus was offering her, the crowd didn't understand Jesus when he said that the food which he offered was better than the manna with which Moses fed the children of Israel.

Both water and bread in scripture are used in reference to that which gives life. Jesus called Himself both bread and water--for truly he is the giver of life (John 10:10b; John 3:16).

"I am the Bread of Life . . . He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Certainly, Jesus was not referring to the bread and water that only fills and satisfies for a while. For as he said to the woman at the well, if she drank of the well's water, she would surely thirst again, but the water he was offering her was Living water that would satisfy her thirst forever. And now, in our lesson for today, he was offering this crowd bread that would satisfy them forever.

You see, Jesus was making a profound point in the statement, "I am the bread of life," that, as Westerners, we may not fully grasp. For us, bread is optional. We may enjoy it, especially the variety of breads we can purchase in our super markets today. We can get our bread as white bread, whole wheat bread, multigrain bread, cornbread, flatbread, cinnamon bread, rye bread, buckwheat bread, Italian bread, yeasted bread, unleavened bread, sourdough bread, etc. We can get our bread as a biscuit, a roll, a waffle, a bagel, a bun . . . and the list goes on seemingly forever.

But in Palestine, bread was not looked upon as an add-on to a meal. Bread was the essential staple. You might have nothing else to eat, but as long as you had bread, you could survive. Bread was seen as that which provides life. Jesus was saying to the crowd and is saying to us today, "I am the one who provides life abundant and everlasting. I am not an option, if you really want life. I am essential. I am necessary."

You may remember that story that came out of World War II. The Germans forced many twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys into the Junior Gestapo. These boys were treated very harshly and given inhumane jobs to perform.

When the war ended, most of these young people had lost track of their families and wandered without food or shelter. As part of an aid program to post-war Germany, many of these youths were placed in tent cities. Here doctors and psychologists worked with the boys in an attempt to restore their mental and physical health.

These boys were suffering serious emotional problems. They found that many of the boys would awaken in the middle of the night, screaming in terror.

One doctor suggested that the boys' fears might relate to a lack of security. What could they do to make them feel more secure? Someone had an idea for handling that fear. After feeding the boys a large meal, they put the boys to bed with a piece of bread in their hands, which they were told to save until morning. For children who knew the pain of near-starvation, this bread represented security to them.

That night, all the boys fell asleep peacefully, each clutching his bread. The boys then slept soundly because, after so many years of hunger, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day. (2)

Because we are not as dependent on bread as Jesus' original listeners, we may not appreciate as much as they what he meant when he said that he is the bread of life. He is saying, in effect: "You cannot live without me. I am essential to your life." This may

be why the first petition in the Lord's Prayer is, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is a reminder to ourselves as well that all we need is from God and the daily part is our promise to pray everyday.

For many people historically, life without bread was impossible. People in less affluent lands have a much greater appreciation of this idea than we do.

This brings us to the essential truth we need to take away with us this day: Christ alone can satisfy our deepest need. "People will do anything to be satisfied in life. In fact, people are searching for life and meaning in life. The drunkard is looking for life. The drug addict is looking for life. The adulterer is looking for life . . . The corporate climber is looking for life. Even the American redneck, whatever that is, is looking for life.

"In each person, God has created a void. That void is the desire for meaning and fulfillment in life. Even though all persons are looking for life, many are searching in all the wrong places. Jesus is the life people are looking for in life. I believe firmly that all persons are in the process of searching for Jesus.. everyone is searching for Jesus. Each person here today is in the process of coming to Jesus. They think they are searching for meaning in life, but they are really searching for Jesus."

In the Lord's Prayer, the first petition is what? "Give us this day our daily bread." Of course that is bread for the body, but do we not need to seek daily for bread for the soul? That bread is Christ. Who else loves us as much as he?

Physical Presence, Personal Presence, Real Presence Transubstantiation

There is a popular fable of a man who was in love with a girl who was blind. He loved her so much that he was willing to do anything for her, including help her gain her sight. She knew of his love but never wanted to burden him with being in a relationship with someone who was blind. She kept insisting that he should choose someone else and move on with his life. But he was unrelenting! He loved her unconditionally and didn't find being with her a burden but rather, a pleasure.

One day, he received the best news ever! Technology had made it possible for doctors to do an eye transplant to help the blind gain sight. What an amazing opportunity, he thought. But she would need a donor. Unfortunately, there was no suitable donor. So he made the most selfless, loving decision one can ever make--he sacrificed his own eyes.

But after surgery, and after she had recovered, the girl opened her new eyes and was amazed at how fair she was to look upon. Outside, waiting to see her, was he who had loved her from the start. He walked in and called her by name.

"Who are you?" She inquired. He told her who he was and to his shock realized how hostile she was. "I am sorry, but I cannot be with any eyeless man. I need a handsome man by my side. Do you see how beautiful I am?"

Hurt and feeling dejected, he walked away. When her family came to visit her, she told them of the audacity of this out-of-order man. From her descriptions, they realized to whom she was referring. They informed her of the young man's great sacrifice and chided her for her indifference toward him.

Stricken to the heart, she searched profusely for him but it was too late. He had already left. (5)

Somebody else made a selfless sacrifice 2,000 years ago in our behalf. Jesus sacrificed, not his eyes, but his life so that we could have life. His was a far greater sacrifice. Ours was a far greater gain!

The bread of life has come so that we can have life! Are we, like that young lady, going to respond with indifference, or will we with gratitude and appreciation surrender our lives to him?

1. <http://maxlucado.com/read/topical/the-write-stuff-2/>

2. Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

5. Contributed. Source unknown.

King Duncan