

18th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The film producer Alfred Hitchcock was well known for the tense atmosphere he was able to produce in his many thrillers. Among his friends Hitchcock was well known for the tense atmosphere he created when he waited for his dinner. One evening he was very disappointed when he saw the small portions that were being served at a private dinner he attended. After dinner the host said to him, "I do hope you will dine with us again soon." Hitchcock replied "by all means. Let's start now."

Some time later Hitchcock watched with fascination as his wife prepared a cheese soufflé'. After she had put the dish into the oven, his eyes remained glued to the oven door. "What is going on behind that door?" he asked every few minutes, lowering his voice to a whisper in case a sudden noise should prevent the soufflé' from rising. By the time the dish was ready, and Mrs Hitchcock opened the oven door to reveal a perfect soufflé', Hitchcock was in a state of nervous exhaustion. "No more soufflé's until we have an oven with a glass door," he said. "I can't stand the suspense."

Longing for food is more than a popular human pastime. In today's first reading the whole community of Israel complain to Moses and express their longing for good food. They have their new freedom, but the menu that goes with it offers very small portions. The slavery of Egypt is behind them, but now they remember the country of bondage as the place where "we were able to sit down to pans of meat and could eat to our heart's desire." And they express their complaint to Moses, "As it is, you have brought us to the wilderness to starve this whole company to death !"

The Israelites are tempted to make a u-turn to Egypt, to follow the compass of their stomachs rather than focus on the way to freedom through wilderness. Slavery with good food looks more attractive to them than freedom on a starvation diet. God hears the complaints of Israel and promises that they shall eat meat and have bread to their hearts' content. In the morning there is "a thing

delicate, powdery” on the surface of the desert. When the people ask Moses what it is, he tells them it is “the bread the Lord gives you to eat.”

In today’s Gospel reading another crowd follow the instructions of their stomach and express their longing for food. This time it is the crowd of Galileans who, on the previous day, ate to their heart’s content when Jesus offered them a meal of barley loaves. Now they follow Jesus to Capernaum, his base on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd is hungry again.

Jesus tells his hungry pursuers that they are only following him because they have enjoyed the food that physically satisfies them; they should work, he says, for the food that endures to eternal life. The one work which earns this food is believing in the one God has sent. The Galileans promptly ask Jesus for a sign to aid their belief in him – a sign like the manna their fathers ate in the desert. When Jesus points out that it was God, not Moses, who supplied the manna, he compare himself to the God who now gives food from heaven. Whoever believes in him will never be hungry.

The promise that Jesus held out to the Galileans is one that is held out to us today. It is a promise fulfilled in the eucharist that we now celebrate. If there is one thing we all share in this assembly, it is the same hunger. We hunger for a love that does not disappoint; we hunger for a word that does not fade away; we hunger for bread that does not fail to satisfy. In this Eucharist the love of a tender God is offered tgo us in word and sacrament.

In this gathering, this local Church, we are nourished by God’s word and the bread of life. The word spoken is opened up to us, the bread offered is broken for us to share.

This is not something we come to look at, like a still-life painting in an art gallery; rather it is something we come here to do. The Eucharist is a word that flows into deed; it is an *action*. It is the act of sharing in the bread of life, participating in the life of Jesus himself.

We continue to return here because we are hungry for God, because the food that physically satisfies is not enough for us. There will be times when we wish we

were elsewhere, times when what happens here will leave us untouched, times when we will be distracted by a litany of worries that refuse to go away. No matter. Sometimes we have to be content with the act of faith that brings us here, a public admission of our need for God and the people of God. In coming here we declare that we cannot fall back on our own resources: we need Jesus, the bread of life, to sustain us. Staying hungry for his bread means that we do indeed long for the food that endures to eternal life. That is what Jesus asks.