

**What Kind of Work?**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Jn 6:24-35)**

The day after the Multiplication of Loaves and Fish, Jesus speaks about the Eucharist, and he introduces the subject by presenting *himself* as the true bread which the people must work for: “*Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you*” (Jn 6:27).

Initially, the people do not realize this “bread which endures” is referring to him; they simply assume Jesus intends to perform some other miracle, better than the one he performed yesterday. Because Jesus said they must “work” for this bread, the people wish to know what sort of work this must entail, and Jesus explains that it is the work of faith: “*This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent*” (Jn 6:29).

The doctrine of the Eucharist begins with faith in Jesus as the divine Son of God, the one upon whom God the Father has “*set his seal*” (Jn 6:29). A seal bears the image, identity, and authority of the one whose seal it is. Jesus, in his humanity, bears the full imprint of divinity. Without a recognition of his divinity, the Eucharist will make no sense. The Eucharist will not be some magical bread to which is attached the grace of eternal life. The Eucharist will not be “symbolic” of Christ or the divine life. Rather, it will be the means of union with Christ who is Divine, on a level both spiritual and physical, and in this way it will bring eternal life. Thus, the first step for accepting the doctrine of the Eucharist, is to recognize in faith, and accept Jesus, in his divinity.

The purpose of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fish, was not to take away the people’s need to labor for the food they eat (i.e., Jesus is not some socialist political Messiah whose government will provide “free” this and that). Instead, the purpose was to reveal himself as the true bread come down from heaven, from God, to nourish the people, just as God nourished the Israelites miraculously in the desert with the manna (Jn 6:31-33).

Under the Messiahship of Christ, the people will still have to labor and work in the world for their food. The Old Testament pattern of working six days and resting on the seventh will continue. But Jesus shifts the Sabbath to himself: “Labor,” he says, “for the food which endures to eternal life, which I will give you, which I am.” “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst*” (Jn 6:35).

This is an important lesson for us today when it comes to work and Sundays. The goal of all our work is to be able to receive the Eucharist on Sundays. We must not allow our job or the other activities of a busy week to compromise our

need to put Christ first, and seek him above all else. Sunday must remain sacred, and must be established as the very *reason* we work hard the rest of the week. “Six days shall you labor,” so that everything can be taken care of, leaving us free on the seventh/first day for the one thing necessary, the true bread from heaven that gives us eternal life.

“*Do not work for food that perishes*” (Jn 6:27). I.e., “He who loves his life in this world will lose it” (Jn 12:25). When we die we take nothing with us except what we achieve through faith. In the end, the only thing that is important is our relationships, first of which is our relationship with God. Sunday is for God, and secondarily for family. If we understand what the Eucharist is, Sunday will be paramount in our week. If Sunday is not sacred to our schedule, we do not know or understand or recognize the Eucharist really is.

Thus the teaching on the Eucharist begins with a focus on the identity of Jesus, and a discussion of work and faith. Religion is not to be confused with the rest of our earthly labor, or reduced to just one more thing on the schedule. Religion is a type of work, the spiritual work of faith. Compared to earthly labor, which takes drains life away, it is life-giving “rest” and nourishment. We do not seek Christ so that our earthly labor may be easier or go better; instead, we labor hard and take care of things for six days, so that our worship may be free from distraction and fatigue.