

WEEK ONE August 1

SCREEN: Help Wanted sign

When I was away last week I saw this sign everywhere.
Restaurants, stores and businesses - they're all hiring.
The reason for this is what's being called,
The Great Resignation.
Millions of employees have quit their jobs and are
searching for new ones.
And it's not all about money.
Workers are re-evaluating their lives,
questioning their purpose and where they are headed.
Many are deciding they want something different.
And it's not just the workplace.
People are resigning from other things in life, including churches.
The pandemic has exposed deep seated hungers and longings.
Which if focused in the right direction, can lead to something truly satisfying.

SCREEN: Bread for the World main screen

Today we are beginning our final summer series titled, Bread for the World.
In the Gospel readings this month,
Jesus tells us he is the Bread of Life.
He will declare this to people who are hungry and searching
for something which only he can offer.
So let's get started.

SCREEN: blank red background

Now, for the most part, this series will focus on the Gospel reading,
but today's first reading from the Book of Exodus
perfectly sets up where this series is headed.
Exodus tells us how the Israelites became
God's chosen people.
God sent Moses to lead them from slavery in Egypt
to escape through the Red Sea.

Then they wandered in the wilderness
until they entered the Promised Land.

In the section we heard today, we catch up with them
in the wilderness and they are not happy.

It sounds like they are about to quit - to resign as God's chosen people.
The whole Israelite community was grumbling against Moses and said:

**SCREEN: Would that we had died at the Lord's hand in
the land of Egypt,**

as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!

But you had to lead us into this desert

to make the whole community die of famine!

Let's stop and think about this.

As slaves in Egypt the Israelites had no rights, no freedom,
were forced to break their backs everyday in
the hot sun building the pyramids for Pharaoh.

Now they are free, with their entire future ahead of them.

And experiencing some inconvenience
they long for the "good old days" in Egypt.

How did God respond?

He heard their cries and sent food to feed them.

And Moses said: *"This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."*

Now, if you remember last week's Gospel, we heard how

Jesus fed 5000 people from five loaves of bread and two fish.

In today's Gospel we heard that the crowds who were fed tracked him down.

Not to become his followers but because they want more bread.

So, like the Israelites, they missed the point of Jesus's miracle.

They thought he was some kind of magician:

"Hey Jesus, do that trick with the bread and the fish again!"

And here's the answer he gave them:

**SCREEN: I am the bread of life;
whoever comes to me will never hunger,**

and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

Jesus was not promising an endless supply of free food.

He wasn't talking about physical nourishment at all.

He was inviting them into a personal, spiritual relationship.

Jesus was calling them to become his disciples.

To discover their purpose in life - not in pursuit
of perishable things but of things that last.

And with Jesus leading them, all their longings and desires would be fulfilled.

Every time we gather around this table,

Jesus, the Bread of Life, offers to feed us with his very Body and Blood.

But just like he told the people in the Gospel today,

his offer is not of physical food but spiritual nourishment that
is only possible for those who are his disciples.

See, the Mass we celebrate is not magic.

It requires faith to believe that the host and cup are
truly Jesus's Body and Blood.

This is such a timely series with everything going on right now.

So many people are like the ones in the Gospel - searching for
someone or something to fill them.

And even churchgoers are searching.

SCREEN: Bread for the World main screen

A survey from two years ago indicates that many Catholics
struggle to believe that the Eucharist is really Jesus's Body and Blood.

And yet it is one of the most fundamental beliefs of our faith.

Why does our Church teach this?

Because we take Jesus at his word.

Not only did he tell us in today's Gospel that he is the Bread of Life,
but at the Last Supper he took the bread and said,

This is my body.

He took the cup and said,

This is my blood.

Jesus didn't say, *"Pretend this is my body"* or
"This is a symbol of my blood".

And then he told his followers to
"Do this in memory of me."

And they did.

The community of believers gathered for worship and did as Jesus did.

Our Church teaches that the Mass
is the source and summit of our faith.

This distinguishes us from other churches that see communion
only as a symbol of the Last Supper.

Source and summit.

We derive our strength from the Mass and it is the summit of our faith -
the greatest form of worship there is.

The first disciples discovered this.

When they gathered to celebrate the Eucharist they found the strength
Christ offered.

Strength which enabled them to go out and spread the Gospel.

We must be like them - we must take the Bread of Life we receive here
and then go be bread for the world out there.

But how?

SCREEN: What are your hungers and thirsts?

It has to begin by acknowledging your hungers and thirsts.

What are they?

Are you starving for love, for hope, for healing,
for direction and purpose in your life?

Name your hungers and thirsts - be honest about them.

And know that they may be God's way of drawing you closer to him.

The Catholic writer Matthew Kelly wrote this:

*God places yearnings within us, but so often we try to
satisfy those yearnings with things that are passing,
and end up just as empty as before.*

So true!

Maybe you are part of that Great Resignation I spoke about,
questioning your life, unsure of where you are headed.

Take some time this week to reflect on this question.

Name your hungers and thirsts and then pray every day,
asking Christ, the Bread of Life, to fill you. Amen. +