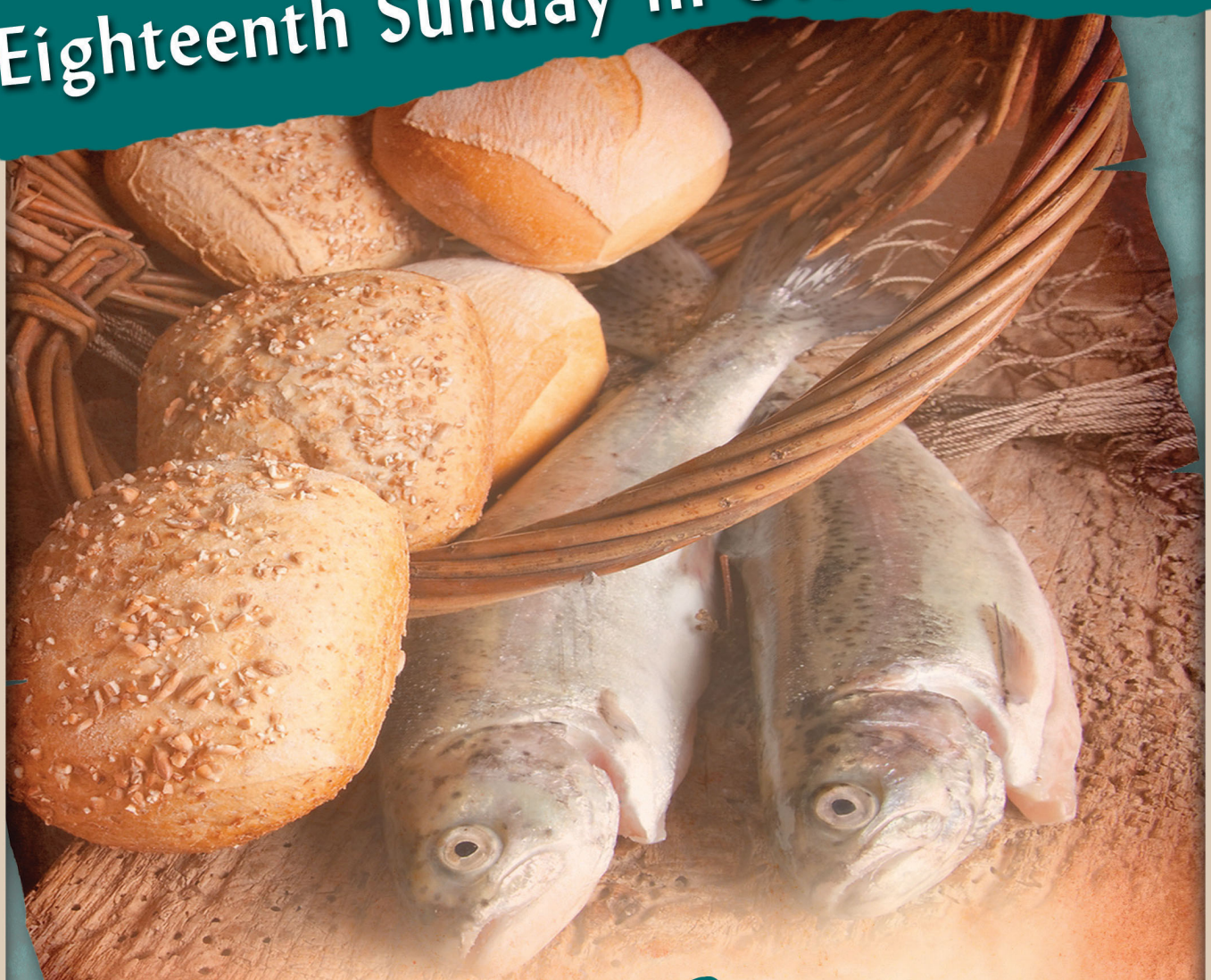
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



August 2, 2020

Jesus said the blessing, broke the loaves,
and gave them to the disciples,
who in turn gave them to the crowds.
They all ate and were satisfied.

Matthew 14:19–20

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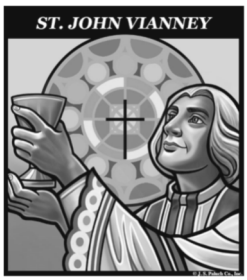
St. John Mary Vianney (1786-1859)

August 4

A busy pastor jokingly suggests the secret of John Vianney's holiness: "He died seventeen years before telephones!" Call they didn't, but visit they did, keeping Vianney eighteen hours a day in the confessional. Stories abound of reading hearts and exorcisms, but Vianney's first miracle was getting ordained. Difficulty with studies delayed him, prompting the rector's apology to the bishop, "So far to ordain just one, especially this one!" The bishop, who could not know he was ordaining the future patron saint of parish priests, replied, "No burden to ordain one good priest!" In Ars, only an elderly handful attended Mass, "praying," one told Vianney, "for a priest with brains." But he stayed forty-two years, fulfilling the promise he made the day he arrived. In a sculpture just outside the village Vianney points skyward: "Show me the way to Ars," he tells a boy, "and I'll show you the way to heaven." To someone who feared there was no heaven beyond the grave, Vianney smiled, "My child, it would have been heaven enough to have lived as Jesus' disciple on earth."



—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Prayer And Humility

Arm yourself with prayer rather than a sword; wear humility rather than fine clothes.

—St. Dominic

Our Deepest Needs

The word of God serves up a tremendous feast for us today. Isaiah beckons all who hunger and thirst to come to the Lord for satisfaction. The psalmist cries out, "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs" (Psalm 145:16). Saint Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Finally, in the Gospel, we hear the story of the miraculous feeding of over five thousand people from a mere five loaves and two fish. Most of us have our material needs met on a day-to-day basis. These scriptures, nevertheless, have much to say to the contemporary believer. We must ask ourselves, "Where are my deepest hungers? Where are my thirsts?" After material needs are satisfied and, in some cases, over-satisfied, many people still experience a deep longing for spiritual balance and well-being. As the loaves and fish are multiplied in today's Gospel, perhaps our prayer can be a longing for the satisfaction of the deepest needs that only God can fill.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Jer 28:1-17; Ps 119:29, 43, 79, 80, 95, 102; Mt 14:22-36
Tuesday:	Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22; Ps 102:16-21, 29, 22-23; Mt 14:22-36 or Mt 15:1-2, 10-14
Wednesday:	Jer 31:1-7; Jer 31:10-12ab, 13; Mt 15:21-28
Thursday:	Dn 7:9-10, 13-14; Ps 97:1-2, 5-6, 9; 2 Pt 1:16-19; Mt 17:1-9
Friday:	Na 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7; Dt 32:35cd-36ab, 39abcd, 41; Mt 16:24-28
Saturday:	Hb 1:12 — 2:4; Ps 9:8-13; Mt 17:14-20
Sunday:	1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-13a; Ps 85:9-14; Rom 9:1-5; Mt 14:22-33

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Tuesday:	St. John Vianney
Wednesday:	Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major
Thursday:	The Transfiguration of the Lord; Hiroshima Memorial Day
Friday:	St. Sixtus II and Companions; St. Cajetan; First Friday
Saturday:	St. Dominic

Today's Readings

First Reading — All you who thirst, come to the water! You without money, come to the feast! (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Psalm — The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs (Psalm 145).

Second Reading — Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

Gospel — All ate until satisfied; they collected twelve baskets of what was left over (Matthew 14:13-21).

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Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 2, 2020

All you who are thirsty,
come to the water!
—Isaiah 55:1a

Treasures From Our Tradition

Over the last several weeks, the history of confirmation has been set out as a rite following baptism and preceding First Communion. Eucharist was a sacrament of spiritual maturity, attuned to the legal age of majority, which was considered to be fourteen years or so. Medieval bishops were often generous, if not especially pious, in seeing to it that children were confirmed before adulthood.

A pattern more familiar to us surfaced in the Diocese of Toulon in France in 1748, where it was decreed that "children are to be confirmed only after receiving First Communion." This was an amazing shift in practice that undermined centuries of theology and tradition by which confirmation was seen as a bridge between font and table. The innovation swept through France and across Europe, despite constant complaints from Rome. French-trained bishops like Cheverus of Boston and Carroll of Baltimore, founders of the American church, established the practice here. The order of the sacraments was thus disrupted in France and in the United States, and remained an eccentric exception to the rule until big developments in 1910.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co., Inc

Our readings today remind us of our hunger and thirst, and how God works within us. We human beings are created dependent on food and water, and much more. And God deeply desires that our needs be met. Our physical hunger and thirst point to our deeper hungers: our need for meaning, purpose, and belonging; and most of all, for unity with God. In Matthew's Gospel passage today, Jesus' heart is moved with compassion for the people. Jesus not only cures the sick and feeds the multitude, he also establishes bonds of community through the shared meal. Saint Paul shows us that nothing can ultimately separate us from God. Isaiah reminds us of God's ongoing invitation to us to come and receive. God's gifts cannot be earned or purchased. God's grace is offered in abundance. God's nourishment is the very best possible, and we should accept no substitutes.

Nothing Can Separate Us

Today's passage from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans concludes Chapter 8 with a flourish. It is the exclamation point of Paul's teaching on the presence of the Spirit within them and among them. The church in Rome faced great suffering as they were marginalized and persecuted for their faith. Paul names both social and cosmic forces that oppress them, over which they have no control. Their trials likely provoked questions that led them to wonder, "Where is God?"

Paul teaches that God is so deeply present within us that nothing can separate us from God. This includes our own forms of resistance. Even when we find myriad ways to avoid and run away, God is waiting patiently. Even when God seems distant or absent, God continues to invite, to welcome, and to speak to us.

Imagining God's Abundance

When reflecting upon today's Gospel passage from Matthew, the story of the feeding of the multitude, we might consider the role of Jesus' disciples. Unlike the very similar story in Matthew 15, Jesus responds to the disciples by saying, "Give them some food yourselves". Jesus is pushing his disciples to think beyond the apparent scarcity, and to open their imaginations to God's abundance. They are to join in with what God is doing. Jesus then takes, blesses, breaks, and shares the bread (anticipating his action at the Last Supper), and the disciples share the loaves with the crowd.

The stories of the feeding of the multitudes also point ahead to the practice of Eucharist in the Church. The Eucharist itself points ahead to God's banquet at the consummation of the reign of God, when all will share God's abundance. We the Church are called to open our imaginations to God present and active, who continually works toward God's promised future. We are to share in God's passionate desire to feed the people, and join in what God is doing here and now.

Today's Readings: Is 55:1–3; Ps 145:8–9, 15–16, 17–18; Rom 8:35, 37–39; Mt 14:13–21

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