

# Sunday Homily

## 18<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

2 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“Listen, listen to me and you will have good things to eat and rich food to enjoy.”

### Illustration

We are all too familiar these days with those heart-rending television pictures that show people in the developing world, often tiny children, ravaged by the effects of hunger and thirst. They are a potent reminder that food and drink are among our most basic necessities; without them, we suffer intensely and ultimately we die.

In our first reading today the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, assures his people that their exile will soon be over: the happy future that then awaits them is symbolised by a plentiful supply of food and drink – an abundance of corn, wine and milk – and all free of charge.

### Gospel Teaching

The Gospel reading takes the theme of providing food a stage further. Having heard the tragic news that John the Baptist has been murdered, and no doubt wondering what his own fate might be, Jesus decides to slip across the Lake of Galilee and spend a few quiet hours with his friends. But the huge crowds that have been following him have other ideas. They hurry round the lake on foot so that, as his little boat comes to shore, there they are awaiting him, like a mammoth welcoming committee. The moment he sees them, all thought of solitude vanishes. At once he is at their disposal, eager to help them and to offer those who are sick his healing touch.

By the time evening falls the disciples are at a loss – and, it must be said, in something of a panic – as to how they are going to feed five thousand and more unexpected guests with nothing more than a few loaves and fishes. Jesus seems to brush aside their anxieties as he takes hold of the loaves and fishes and prays over them. Incredibly, as the disciples distribute them to the people, now sitting on the green grass, not only does everyone eat to their heart’s desire, but at the end there are enough scraps left over to fill a dozen baskets. There could scarcely be a more startling proof that God is concerned for those who are hungry; and that for God numbers – five or five thousand – do not matter.

However, there is more than that to the miracle. We can take note not merely of what Jesus does, but of how he does it. He makes the very gestures that one day

will be used in the institution of the Eucharist, gestures that we still see at Mass today. Jesus took the bread and, raising his eyes to heaven, blessed it, broke it and then gave it to the disciples to distribute. In the early Church “the breaking of bread” was another name for the Mass. It is as if Jesus were saying: “This material food, I know, is vital for you – that is why I provide it – but it can never satisfy your deepest hungers. However, there will come a day when I will provide for those needs also.”

## Application

In 1984, on returning from a visit to an Ethiopia devastated by famine, Cardinal Basil Hume told of a memorable meeting he had had with a little Ethiopian boy. The child, an orphan, clutched the cardinal’s hand and was reluctant to let go. After a while he pointed towards his open mouth; there was no need for an interpreter to explain that the child wanted food. Then he gently rubbed his cheek against the cardinal’s hand, again a self-explanatory sign of his desire for affection. The cardinal commented that the youngster was expressing the needs of every man, woman and child – the need for nourishment and the need for love. Without food there is no life; without love there is no life worth having. In the Eucharist we receive the bread of eternal life and the most powerful pledge of boundless love. After all, the sacrifice of the Mass – the body given for us, the blood shed for us – cost Jesus his life.

Today we are being invited to recognise, with joy and gratitude, that in this Mass, as in every Mass, God is offering us food from heaven: food free of charge; food that satisfies our deepest needs; food that is proof of Christ’s overwhelming love, of his desire to accompany us on our journey through life; food that assures us, in the words of St Paul, that no power, no adversity, absolutely nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# Sunday Homily

## 19<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

9 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III

“Lord! Save me!”

### Illustration

To mark the Millennium, a new footbridge was built in the centre of London, right in the heart of the city’s financial district. It looked beautiful and linked St Paul’s Cathedral with the new Tate Modern art gallery, housed in an old power station. However, when it first opened to the public the bridge wobbled; and it was closed for over a year while engineers restructured it so it wouldn’t wobble any more. Today many pedestrians still tread gingerly, hoping they won’t start the wobble.

In Israel they have built a bridge across part of the Sea of Galilee. An important thing about this bridge is that it is transparent and is at the same level as the water. It’s designed for the pilgrims, to let people see what it’s like to walk on water, to walk where Jesus walked.

Today’s Gospel is one of the most graphic stories we have of Jesus’ life. But it is more about Peter walking on the water than about Jesus. What did Peter really think he was doing, climbing out of the boat and walking towards what he at first thought was a ghost?

### Gospel Teaching

Some people think that, if you have enough faith, life will be all plain sailing. But at some time or other we all face difficult and trying circumstances and situations in our lives. Faith does not shield us from the harsh knocks of life. At those times it is as if the Lord is asking us to walk on water. But at the same time he stretches out his hand and holds us up. Elijah in the first reading was a great man of faith. He was being persecuted and threatened with death and he sought refuge and protection in a cave. A beaten and broken man, he just wanted to die. However, in the cave he experienced the presence of God and was strengthened by that experience to carry on.

To live by faith means to trust God and to rely on God’s power. God won’t carry us but will hold us up if we let go. We are called to take the risk; only then can God help us.

Peter knew that whatever Jesus commanded was possible. It was really a way of testing faith. They had all just seen him cure people, teach them, feed five thousand people with a little bread and fish. Peter has no doubt that what Jesus

commands will happen. But the command needs a response, and we learn that the success of the response depends on his faith. Peter had no choice but to leave the boat and risk his life to learn perhaps the most valuable lesson: the realisation of both his own weakness and the power of Jesus. If Peter had stayed in the boat, his faith would have been worthless and never tested.

## Application

Peter is the model of a very human journey of faith. He seeks, he steps, he fails, he is saved, he praises – and it all repeats again. If we say we are Christians and never make a step like Peter, trusting our faith and trusting Christ, then how do we know we really do believe? Every time Peter tried to show his faith, he failed: he betrayed Jesus verbally, he ran away, he took the side of Satan; and in today's story he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. But every time he fell and his faith failed, he rose up again and became closer to Christ. He had the good sense at least to call out for help. In the moments of his weakness he knew enough to reach out to Christ. The failures of Peter only made him love Christ more – only made him rely on Christ more.

The sea is often used as a metaphor for life. Perhaps the Gospel is saying that no matter how dark life might be, and no matter how high the waves are or how rough the sea, Jesus is still able to reach us and is still able to lift us out of life's trauma, if only we trust him totally and keep our eyes fixed on him. God does not necessarily work by way of miracles in our lives. God probably doesn't want us walking on water. The Lord simply assures us he will be with us always. And when our faith is weak or when it fails completely, we can still be like Peter and call out: "Lord! Save me!"

# Sunday Homily

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

16 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

“The Almighty has done great things for me.”

### Illustration

Two very different sets of images might help us enter into the spirit and significance of this wonderful feast of Mary’s assumption into heaven. The first set of images comes from a primary school. The children had been thinking about Our Lady, and their teacher had asked them to draw pictures of what she might have looked like. Most of their drawings showed Mary doing the kinds of things their own mums or grandmothers did. Some were sat down with the child Jesus on their knee. Others were walking, leading Jesus by the hand. One was carrying shopping bags; another was baking a cake. They were all shapes and sizes, with varying designs and a mixture of colours. Some looked like scarecrows; others were more glamorous, almost like pop stars. But what united them all was their ordinariness, their humanity. To the children, Mary was a woman like their own mother, even though they knew she was also very special as the mother of Jesus.

The second image comes from the magnificent cathedral church, the Minster, in York, England. The vaulted arches stretching up to the ceiling meet in a number of what are known as “bosses”, carved and decorated with symbols of faith. In one of these bosses, above the entrance to the choir and the high altar, is an image of the assumption, dating from the fifteenth century. Beautifully coloured, it shows Mary crowned and ascending towards heaven in an oval garland of flowers, supported on either side by golden angels. Here is a very different Our Lady, one who seems other-worldly, almost beyond us.

### Gospel Teaching

This celebration invites us to reflect on the different dimensions of Mary’s life. At one and the same time, she is totally like us, she is as human as we are; and yet, unlike us, she followed Jesus perfectly and generously and now lives fully in his presence. Mary’s earthly existence found its meaning and completion in her heavenly existence. And this transition is promised to every believer: we too, one day, will be present to Jesus, as Mary is present to Jesus. As a famous hymn puts it, Mary is a “light on earth’s horizon”. She is a sign of hope for us of the promise of our future glory.

This is what St Paul was speaking about when he wrote to the Corinthians. The magnificent consequence of the resurrection is that all will be brought back to life

in Christ. Death has been destroyed, so that, in the fullness of time, all who have fallen asleep in Christ and belong to him will be raised to the heights of heaven. When Mary proclaimed her song of thanksgiving in the Magnificat, she gave praise for the great things God had done. God had called her, a lowly peasant-girl, and blessed her with a unique and awesome privilege. She was to be the mother of Jesus, the long-expected Messiah, the one whose very name means "God saves". It's impossible for us to know at what point Mary realised in her own life that the greatest thing God would do for her would be to raise her son from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is the key to understanding Mary's assumption.

Although all die, says St Paul, in Christ all will be brought back to life. The imagery in the book of the Apocalypse, of the woman giving birth to a son, has many different interpretations. However, Christians down the ages have seen in her a reflection of Mary, closely linked to the victory and power of God and the authority of Christ. This great victory of God in Christ is the risen life, won through the cross and the empty tomb. Mary's assumption is her full participation in this mystery of our faith.

## Application

Elizabeth described Mary as "the most blessed" of all women. She was "blessed" not only because God had chosen her, but also because Mary believed that the promise made to her by God would be fulfilled. This promise, that Mary would give birth to God's Son, was the prelude to another promise: Jesus' promise that whoever lives and believes in him shall not die, but have eternal life. This promise is for everyone, for all of us here.

Mary's assumption – her being taken up, body and soul, into heavenly glory – is really a feast that flows out of Easter. It's her feast, but it's also our feast. It's a celebration in the life of Mary of what the resurrection ultimately means for us – fullness of life with Jesus in heaven.

# Sunday Homily

## 21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

23 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I

“It was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you  
but my Father in heaven.”

### Illustration

Bob travelled to work every day on the train. He had his usual seat. For as long as he could remember, the man sitting opposite him had made the same daily journey. Over time, Bob had got to know a bit about his fellow commuter. He guessed from the way he dressed that he probably worked in an office in the city. He observed that he liked to read detective novels. In cold weather he wore what looked like an old college scarf. Bob could tell when the man was running late, because he brought a cereal bar for his breakfast. And he assumed he had a family, because he carried a picture of what Bob thought must be his wife and two children in his wallet. But although the two travellers had nodded to each other, they had never spoken.

Then one day the train ground to a halt. Bob listened to the dreaded announcement, something about a blockage on the line. They were in for a long delay. His neighbour sighed. Then he leaned over from his seat and reached out his hand towards Bob. “Hi,” he said, “I’m Jim.”

At that moment, their relationship changed. Bob had known a certain amount about Jim, but until then he could never have said that he knew him. Now, as they chatted, he began to get to know him. But if Jim hadn’t taken the initiative, they would have remained strangers.

### Gospel Teaching

In a way, the same sort of thing happened to Peter. He’d been with Jesus for some time. He knew a lot about him: where he came from, his family background. He’d travelled with him. He’d heard his teaching. He’d seen the things that Jesus had done, the way he treated those who were sick, those who were poor, those who were outcasts. But did he really know him? Who was this man?

Peter wasn’t alone in wondering. People had all sorts of theories about Jesus, who he might be, what his mission was. They talked about it among themselves. But nobody could truly claim to know. When Jesus finally asked his disciples the question, a lot of different answers came gushing out. “But you,” he said, “who do you say I am?”

Peter wasn't sure where the words came from. But suddenly he knew. Suddenly he realised who Jesus was, what his teaching was about. It was as though the sun had dawned, bringing light into the darkness. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What had happened? How did Peter know this? He'd known about as much as anyone could know about a person. He'd followed him, seen all that he did and hung upon his every word. But now he'd taken a decisive step further. He'd moved beyond simply knowing about Jesus and begun truly to know him. Jesus himself recognised what had happened. This wasn't a step that Peter, or anyone else, could take alone. It could only be taken with God's help. It was nothing less than a gift of God.

## Application

There are many ways, many opportunities, to learn about God. We can read books, watch TV programmes or videos, listen to tapes. We can go and listen to skilful teachers and inspiring preachers. But if all that happens is that we learn facts and listen to opinions, then it may be the case that we know about God – but do we really know God?

"How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods!" Paul's exclamation of wonder and praise may make us wonder what is the point of trying to learn the ways of God. Paul, like Peter, came to know that this is not something that we can do on our own. Paul, a highly educated and extremely religious Pharisee, thought that he knew all there was to know about God. But it was only after God had taken the initiative on the road to Damascus that Paul truly came to know God. Peter thought he knew as much about Jesus as anyone could. But it was only when the Father revealed the truth to Peter that he truly began to know him.

Can we take that step further? Can we progress from knowing about God to knowing God? It's something we can only do with God's help. God has shown us the way in Jesus. Are we willing to journey with him, not as strangers but as friends?

# Sunday Homily

## 22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

30 AUGUST 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“The way you think is not God’s way.”

### Illustration

A teacher is talking to a class of children. “Look around you,” she says. “See how many things you can see in the classroom that are coloured red.” For a minute or two, the children look around intently, trying to find as many red objects as they can.

“OK,” says the teacher, “now tell me what you have noticed.” Straight away the answers come flooding out: books on the shelves; the red marker pen on the teacher’s desk; the fire alarm bell; Jo’s sweater. Each of the children is keen to find something new.

After a few minutes, the list seems to be exhausted. “Now,” says the teacher, “I want you to close your eyes.” The children do so, waiting for their memories to be tested. There is a pause. “Now,” says the teacher, “keep your eyes closed. And tell me the things that are coloured green.” This time there is silence. The children have been concentrating so much on things that are red that it’s hard to think of anything different.

### Gospel Teaching

Last Sunday, we heard how Peter finally recognised Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” At last the longed-for Messiah had come. The Jewish people had been waiting for centuries for the Lord’s anointed to come and deliver them. The popular expectation was that he would be a great political leader, who would subdue the enemies of Israel and guide the nation to an era of peace and prosperity. Jesus’ response to Peter’s insight was to call him blessed, to call him the “rock,” and to talk about the keys of the kingdom.

We can only imagine how Peter must have felt. The Messiah’s kingdom was coming, and he, Peter, the fisherman, was to have an important role in it. What would this mean? His mind must have been filled with many things as he contemplated the future in the light of this revelation.

But the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, failed to recognise Jesus as the Christ. He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Their expectations were filled with the image of the political leader, the royal figure of power and might. They thought they knew what the Messiah would be like; and they couldn’t see him in this poor son of a carpenter from Nazareth.

In a sense Peter fell into the same trap. He could accept Jesus as the Christ. But once he had done so, his mind was filled with all the usual preconceptions of what the Messiah would be like, what he would do, how he would be the powerful leader of Israel. And so, when Jesus began to speak about the need for him to suffer and to die, it simply did not fit in with the way Peter was thinking. The popular image of the Messiah had filled his mind, and he found it impossible to think of him in a different way. Jesus had to begin to teach his disciples a new way of looking at things. It would take Peter a long time to realise the truth of his teaching.

## Application

As we live in the world today, our minds are filled with many things. As we grow and develop in faith, some of our attitudes and perceptions can change. But it's still true that many of our views are swayed by the prevailing beliefs of the society in which we live. And so we tend to see happiness and fulfilment in terms of material success, wealth, and worldly status or influence. It's hard to accept that there is another way.

This is a truth that Paul recognises. He calls us to use our minds, our intellects, to live as "thinking beings." But he teaches us too not to be conformed to the world around us, not to be bound and restricted by the world's thinking. We are to allow the Gospel to free our minds to "discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do"

Jesus had to show his disciples that the way of God is different from the way of the world. The Christ, the chosen one of God, would face suffering and death as he followed God's way. It may be hard at times for us to see that the way of the cross is the better way. But if we want to follow Christ, we have to be willing to walk that way.