

18 (B)

Some say that large pockets of Latin America are edging their way towards Protestantism. You have a proportion of 'fired up' glamorous, flashily-dressed televangelists coming down from the United States with a travesty of the gospel message. They preach a sort of prosperity gospel with believes that "if you give your money to God i.e. to them, he will bless you with more money." Some go so far as to tell these poor people that being a good Christian and financial success go together and so are easily deceived.

Now I think that something similar is happening in the gospel today. After they 'had all the bread they wanted to eat' the people flocked after Jesus and wanted to crown him King on the spot. But Jesus saw the danger and was having none of it, so he makes a quick exit into the hills. Their motives for following him were a bit dubious - a bit like the Latin American scenario.

Later on when the furore had died down, Jesus confronts the people again and tells them: "Unfortunately you are only following me because you had all the bread you wanted to eat". Labour not for the food that perishes but for that which endures for eternal Life." Of course he was talking here about Himself, the Bread of Life, whom we receive in Holy Communion. Receiving Him in Holy Communion is primarily about preparing us for Eternal Life not worldly betterment or advancement. Heaven is our true homeland and receiving Our Lord worthily in Holy Communion will help keep our eyes fixed on that goal.

Jesus says: "he who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst". Using religion for short-term gains like for instance seeking baptism to secure a catholic education for your child with little or no interest in the church or Mass or the other sacraments will mean we are not that much different from the people in today's gospel, whom to the

disappointment of Our Lord, only sought him out for temporal sustenance as when he multiplied the loaves and fishes for them last Sunday.

If people have distanced themselves from the Mass, are they not in danger of being malnourished spiritually? Yes, there are people who have the trappings of religion – you only see them in church mostly for baptisms, funerals and weddings and maybe at Christmas time. That's hardly going to adequately nourish their spiritual side or prepare them for the Eternal banquet. That sounds a bit like the people in today's gospel who followed Jesus only when they were in the mood. We need to nourish ourselves on the Word of God and the Eucharist at least every week to grow close to Our Lord.

Mere physical presence at Mass does not itself guarantee that all is as it should be either. For instance if we never take the time to examine our consciences or haven't confessed our sins for ages, then receiving Our Lord in Holy communion will fall well short of what Our Lord desires for us.

So we have a lot to reflect on in today's gospel, the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Therein lies much food for thought to nourish our souls and keep us on the path which leads to Life Eternal.