

18 (B)

Some say that large pockets of Latin America are slowly becoming protestant. You have these evangelical pastors coming down from the Unites States with stacks of money. They preach a sort of prosperity gospel with salvation in the here and now buying people into their congregations. Because the people are so poor this prosperity gospel is something they can't resist. They're told that being a good Christian and financial success in life go together. But it's a corruption of the gospel message in the long run.

Now I think that something similar is happening in the gospel today. After they 'had all the bread they wanted to eat' they 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 and escaped into the hills by himself. Their motives for following him were a bit dubious - a bit like the situation in Latin America.

Later on when the furore had died down, Jesus confronts the people again and tells them: "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 Jesus in Holy Communion is primarily about preparing us for Eternal Life not worldly fulfilment. Compared to Eternity this life is so short, only like 'a grain of sand on the seashore' or 'a drop of water in the ocean'. Heaven is our true homeland and we need to keep our eyes fixed on that goal if we're ever to get there.

Pampering themselves with the things which this world has to offer will ultimately fail to deliver whereas Jesus says: "he who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst". There is an existential longing in all of us for a

deeper meaning to life, a real sense of belonging and self-worth, an acceptance of who we are, a craving for pardon and forgiveness – ultimately, a yearning for love without which life is bereft of meaning.

If people have distanced themselves from the church, particularly the Eucharist are they not in danger of going hungry spiritually? Yes, there are people who have the trappings of religion – you only see them in church for baptisms, funerals and weddings and maybe the odd Christmas for nostalgic reasons. That is hardly going to nourish their spiritual side or prepare them for Eternal Life. That sounds a bit like the people in today's gospel who followed Jesus only when it suited them.

Mere physical presence at Mass does not itself guarantee that we are being satisfied spiritually 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 leave a lot to be desired.

So we have a lot to reflect on in today's gospel, the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Therein lies much food for thought to nourish our souls.