



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-August 1st 2021

***Readings: Exodus 16: 2-4. 12-15, Psalm 77, Ephesians 4: 17. 20-24,
John 6: 24-35***

We have got to the stage in the Israelites journey to freedom where the going has got tough. They have, Scripture tells us, started 'murmuring' against Moses. Between a rock and a hard place, they are beginning to resent this testing process of becoming the People of God. In a little while they will be looking back fondly on their time of slavery in Egypt. Forgetting the lash and the insane demands of the genocidal dictator, they will fantasise about the luxurious time when they had cucumbers and watermelons, as much meat and bread as they could eat, and lived a life of unashamed indulgence courtesy of their taskmasters and slave drivers. Freedom seems such an attractive idea until you are faced with the responsibility of actually living it and, correspondingly, taking responsibility and maturing. The former Hebrew slaves are having a nasty bout of corporate adolescence.

We rejoin the story when they are in full flow against their Heavenly Father, God, and the current in loco parentis, Moses.

For 'murmuring' read 'bad-mouthing' or 'bitching'.

The upshot is that they are to appear before the Almighty and see what He gives. He has heard their complaints.

What transpires, in the morning is a powdery substance which will be known thereafter as Manna. It will become a symbol of God feeding His people and be understood later, from New Testament times, as the Bread from Heaven that is the forerunner of Christ and the prophecy of the Bread of the Mass which feeds the pilgrim for the journey and is a direct gift from and of God.

All very straightforward stuff - hardly worth troubling you with a sermon.

BUT... there is one little phrase in this account which speaks volumes. Seeing the unprepossessing stuff, the Manna, the people say, 'What is that?'

Of course it's all down to tone. Is it the reverential, 'What is that?'

Or is it the scarcely disguised contempt tone? '**What** is **that**?'

In fact this question is the very essence of the thing.

The word 'MANNA' is simply the Hebrew for, 'WHAT IS THAT?'

It's not much to look at. It's not exactly meat and two veg. Not even cuisine minceur. It wouldn't be on any self-respecting menu.

However.....it will be what sustains the People of God for their journey to the Land of the Promise. It is a direct gift from God, an earnest of His Presence and an honouring of His promise.

How different is that from the Manna, the Bread of Heaven that we consume daily in the Mass? It sure doesn't look much. It's not haute cuisine. (The accompanying wine is not vintage,) To the unfaithful eye, the eye that cannot discern the gift of God, has no vision of the supernatural, it looks like nothing more than a rather dull biscuit. That it alone will sustain the pilgrim all the way to the Promised Land is the extraordinary truth. And why? Because it is of God from God, the Bread of Heaven, the sign and reality of the Presence.

And here's where the Catholic Faith truly kicks in.

The faithful kneel and know the answer to the reverential question,
'What is that?'

It is the Body of Christ, the signal and substance of the Real Presence.
If it is not then I suggest we all stop wasting our time, have a great roast
lunch and raise a glass of vintage red to our happy days in slavery to sin.
To the non-believer, it does appear to be just a rather unappetising
wheat product and they will say, 'WHAT is THAT?'

Unless a pilgrim explains to them what this miraculous Manna is, how
will they ever know? And unless they see, in our demeanour before the
Blessed Sacrament and in receiving the sacred Host, how are they to
even guess the mystery of their redemption hidden there in plain view.
Unless they see in our lives and hear in our words the revelation, how
are they to identify the pilgrim bread, the staff of eternal life, the
incarnation of the eternal, the food for the journey, the Presence,
transformed and transforming.

Our job, as evangelists, as followers who want to lead others out of the
wilderness to the Promised Land is a simple one. We want only to
change the tone of the people from 'WHAT is THAT?????'
to, 'What is that?' From contempt or bafflement to intrigue and humble
enquiry.

It is Manna - It is the Bread of Life -
and the manner in which a man approaches it is determinative for the
journey.