

11.26.2023 Sunday Next Before Advent (St. John 6:5-14)

Last Thursday, on Thanksgiving Day, it's estimated that Americans consumed 730 million pounds of turkey, at a cost of over 1 billion dollars. On Black Friday, businesses in the U.S. expected consumers to spend 30-50 billion dollars in stores, and another 9 billion online. Tomorrow, on Cyber Monday, U.S. consumer spending is projected to be close to 12 billion dollars, and total holiday spending this year, according to the National Retail Federation, will be just under 100 billion dollars. If you needed a reminder that Americans are consumers, consumers of enormous amounts of food and products of every kind, look no further than the holiday season.

We certainly live in a consumerist culture, and the companies that make the products we consume, as well as those who advertise for them, reinforce this consumerist mindset by encouraging us to believe that there's never enough. There is only bigger and better. The latest, the greatest, the next best thing, and while every new purchase comes with the empty promise that we will finally be happy and fulfilled with what we have, the reality is that the consumer is never satisfied for long. In our day we see that problem manifested in the great number of people who continually desire something better than what they have - a bigger house, a better car, nicer clothes, and the latest technology, but consumerism isn't a new, twenty-first century problem, it's been a stumbling block since the beginning.

When we consider the story of Adam and Eve found in Genesis, we recognize the problem of consumerism in their prideful desire to have something more than that which God so generously provided for them. In Eden, God said, "*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Genesis 2:16-17). God gave our first parents the fruit of *every tree*, except one, and as you know the overwhelming abundance He provided wasn't enough to satiate their selfish desires, because the consumer is never satisfied for long.

Consumerism is not a modern problem, it's proven to be a stumbling block since the beginning, but in a passage we'll consider this morning, God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, graciously revealed the solution. The words we read

from the Gospel today are familiar to us all. The feeding of the 5,000 is the miraculous account of our Lord multiplying a little boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish, to feed a great multitude of people. The Gospel authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all describe the events of that day, and agree that our Savior Christ provided all of these people with not only something to eat, but with a full meal. The text tells us that Jesus *"took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted"* (John 6:11). *"And they all ate and were satisfied"* (Matthew 14:20; Mark 6:42; Luke 9:17).

The consumers were satisfied, but not for long. On the very next day, when they realized that our Lord was no longer there, we learn that the people in this crowd took boats to Capernaum, seeking Jesus, and *"when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you"* (John 6:25-27).

It appears that many of the people who followed Jesus to the other side of the sea were consumers who thought more of their own stomachs than they thought of God. *"Truly, truly,"* Jesus said, *"You are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* They had their sights set on loaves and fish, instead of our Lord. They'd witnessed a miracle and were happy to fill their stomachs, but they failed to see the greater sign. This breathtaking miracle that our Lord performed was tangible evidence, a clear sign that He had come from God, and to turn and follow Him because He was the Promised Messiah, their Redeemer, would've been the proper, loving response, but to follow Him only to get another meal was surely the worst kind of selfish consumerism.

Consumers seek Jesus, not because they are convinced of His identity as *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29), not because they've heard His call to take up their cross daily and follow Him (Mark 8:34), and not that they may live a life of intimate communion with Him (John 17). Instead, consumers seek Jesus to fill their stomachs. They follow Him, not because they love Him, but for what they think they can get from

Him. In this first century example it was loaves and fish, and in our day it may still be the promise of a meal that motivates some people to follow our Lord. For others it may be the health and wealth promised by the prosperity gospel, or any number of social programs or activities that are available through the Church, but to seek Jesus for any of these selfish reasons it to seek Him only to fill your stomach, it is to work *“for the food that perishes,”* instead of the *“food that endures to eternal life.”*

Jesus made a clear distinction between these two types of food, two types of bread, one that perishes, and one that endures forever, and His words bring to mind a conversation He had about two types of another substance, water, and living water, with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. When our Lord met this woman at the well, He said to her, *“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:13-14). Consumers work for the food that perishes. Bread that promises to satisfy, but soon leaves us hungry. Water that promises to quench our thirst, but alas, we thirst again. The material things we chase after and consume never last - they always perish, because even the best material things were not created for eternity.

Therefore: *“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”* The only food that satisfies our hunger for God, the only water that quenches our thirst for eternity, is that which Christ gives to us: *His* blessings of grace, *His* gift of forgiveness, *His* Body, *His* Blood, *His* life everlasting. In our culture the material, consumerist mindset surrounds us, especially at this time of year, but we do not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4), for God is the real source of life, life that begins today and endures through eternity.