



18th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Sr. Nuala Cotter

samedi 4 août 2018

Whose Questions ?

[T]hey said to him,

"What can we do to accomplish the works of God ?"

Jesus answered and said to them,

"This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." (John 6 : 28-29)

For a moment there, Jesus must have had real hope. The question "they" ask him about accomplishing the works of God seems very serious, and he answers in the same vein : "believe in the One he sent."

He has been revealing himself as that One through various signs (in John's gospel) and deeds of power (in the synoptic gospels). The blind have seen, the deaf have heard, the sick have been healed ; water has been turned into wine. So, it's simple : to "accomplish the works of God," says Jesus, start by recognizing what the work of God is. And I'll give you another clue : the work of God is to believe in the One he has sent.

Confused silence for a second, followed by : "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you ? What can you do ?" So much for accomplishing " the work of God." In contemporary idiom, these questions could be rendered like this : So what have you done for us lately ?

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It's easy to feel impatient with these people and their dim, self-serving questions. Just before he answers the question about God's work, Jesus himself has pointed out their motivation for seeking him out :

"Amen, amen, I say to you,
you are looking for me not because you saw signs
but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

And yet, he answers that question about God's work in a deep way, respecting the question even if the questioners' motives are not so pure. A moment or two later, after they ask for a "sign that we may see and believe in you," he doesn't turn away in exasperation, but responds in what might be called deep

language :

"Amen, amen, I say to you,
it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven ;
my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.
For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven
and gives life to the world."

Their needy but shallow reply - "Sir, give us this bread always." - prompts his final, deepest word :

"I am the bread of life ;
whoever comes to me will never hunger,
and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

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Where are we in this story ? Which questions are ours ? On which level of understanding, which level of faith, do we stand, we who have access to this Bread of Life so freely and so often ?

Jesus will go on to use even deeper language to describe his total offering of self, and it will dismay and even disgust many. Others, however, will reply, even in the dimness of their vision : "Lord, to whom shall we go ?"

Which questions are ours ?

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Ex 16:2-4, 12-15 ; Ps 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54 ; Eph 4:17, 20-24 ; Jn 6:24-35

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