

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 13

August 2, 2009

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Psalm 78:23-29

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

What Must We Do?

Our Gospel lesson follows immediately upon John's account of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand. This miracle, like all of Jesus' miracles, has both a physical and a spiritual dimension. There is no doubt that Jesus was genuinely concerned about the physical hunger of the crowds, but he also had an eternal truth to convey. That truth was made clear in this passage which took place the day after the miracle.

Those who had been fed followed Jesus across the sea, surely hoping to receive something more from him. Jesus now surprises them by saying they need to work for the food that endures to eternal life, admonishing them for not seeing in the miracle a sign of God's presence and power to satisfy the deeper, lasting needs of life. (John 6:27).

The crowd retorts with, *what must we do* to be doing the works of God? There is but one work, according to Jesus, that leads to eternal satisfaction, believing on the one whom God has sent. The work that is necessary is the exercise of faith. They must believe. Then Jesus offers himself not only as the object of belief but as the very Bread of Life. Amazingly this crowd, who only hours before had witnessed Jesus feeding in excess of five thousand people, immediately asks for a sign from him so they can believe him.

We may be taken aback at their lack of faith and seeming audacity in asking for a sign when most of the crowd had undoubtedly witnessed a number of signs already. But are our own responses so very different? Do we recognize, appreciate and meditate upon the signs of God's presence and power in our own daily experience? Do we recognize the sacred in what we so often take for granted as the "common" things of life?

If we cannot respond in the affirmative to any of these questions, then there is room for growth in our faith walk. *What must we do* to be more tuned in to the truths God has for us? The answer is no different today than it was on that day when Jesus addressed the crowd at Capernaum. We must exercise faith, we must believe on him whom God has sent, and like the father whose son was deaf and mute because of an evil spirit (Mark 9:17-24), we must pray that God will help our unbelief.

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. Thomas R. May, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as a Director in the Global Scripture Ministries area.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Russian Federation – With thanks to God for the distribution of Scriptures to thousands of schools and Sunday Schools and for the relationships with Russian churches of all denominations, and with prayers for the completion of the first Chuvash Bible and for the completion of the Bible in contemporary Russian in 2010; **Ukraine** – With prayers that the annual Bible Day celebration will lead people to a better understanding of the importance of the Word of God in their lives and encourage them to study it and apply it to daily life, and with prayers for God's guidance in the construction of a new office in Kiev; **Belarus** – With thanks to God for providing funds for projects aimed at reaching people in need, for the completion of the translation of the Bible into Belarusian, and for strengthening ties and developing cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church, and with prayers that the Lord will provide funding for publishing the Belarusian Bible.

Activity Corner: "Bread of Life" Montage

Supplies needed: Bible; pattern in the shape of a slice of bread; 8-1/2" x 11" construction paper (assorted colors); pens or pencils; scissors; poster board or sheet of newsprint; old food magazines; marker; glue or paste.

Read John 6:35 and discuss what Jesus means when he says that he is the "bread of life." Ask each member of your household to trace and cut out a "slice of bread" from a sheet of construction paper. On the front side, ask each one to write, *Jesus said*, "I am the bread of life." On the reverse side, ask each one to write how they will share this "bread" with someone else during the week. Across the top of the poster board or newsprint, write the same words. Create a montage with pictures of bread from various magazines. "Frame" the montage with each one's "slice of bread" that indicates their sharing commitment. Conclude by reading Psalm 78:23-29 as a closing prayer.