

Homily – John 6: 24 – 35
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
Vigil Mass, 31st July 2021, Riverstown

James Cash Penney popularly known as J. C. Penney was an American businessman and entrepreneur who founded the J. C. Penney stores in 1902. Though good and honest, J.C. Penney was always primarily interested in being successful and in making money. Mr. and Mrs. Penney worked hard to expand the business. Everything was grand until one day Mrs. Penney caught a cold and developed a pneumonia which claimed her life. It was then that J.C. Penney realized that having money was a poor substitute for the real purposes in living. When his beloved died, he said: “my world crashed about me. To build a business, to make a success in the eyes of men, to accumulate money – what was the purpose of my life? What had money meant for my wife? I felt mocked by life, even by God Himself”. He still had to go through several trials before he finally reached a point of spiritual conversion wherein he testified: “I had to pass through fiery ordeals before reaching glimmerings of conviction that it is not enough for me to be upright and moral. When I was brought to humility and the knowledge of dependence on God, sincerely and earnestly seeking God’s aid, it was forthcoming, and a light illumined my

being. I cannot otherwise describe it than to say that it changed me as a man”. Well! Only humility and total dependence on Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, would bring him eternal peace and joy.

Today’s readings challenge us to trust in the providence of a loving and caring God and to hunger and thirst for the Bread of eternal life – the Holy Eucharist. As human beings, we hunger for many things besides food and material possessions. And precisely here, the Gospel Reading of today talks about a hunger that we have, not of physical hunger, but a spiritual hunger and that God is willing to satisfy that hunger if we but ask. And Paul in his letter to the Ephesians urges his people and really you and me today to put away the old self, our former way of life, move towards what is really true, what is not illusionary if you will. Well, only God can satisfy our various forms of spiritual hunger. And St. Augustine in his Confessions has so beautifully put it this way: *“O God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*

Now, a possible application for you and me in hearing the Scripture could be to take an inventory of who we are at this moment; not of physical inventory but spiritual inventory. May be, we need to pause a while and ask ourselves: “where is it that we put our efforts?

How do we spend our time, our money and our energy? Is it on things that are transitory and things that are really unimportant?”

All of us would very well agree with the fact that there is really little good that comes from having a terminal illness, knowing that you have only a few weeks or months to live. And if ever we happen to encounter someone in that very situation, they often say that the disease has put everything into perspective. That is true for the patient and for family and friends. What was so important before doesn't seem important at all now anymore, whether it is sports, music, entertainments, job, the latest fashion, getting a promotion, luxuries or having a particular social status. What becomes important over and over again then would be the people, family, forgiveness, faith, hope, love and ultimately for a Christian, 'Jesus the bread of life'. Jesus in the Gospel and Paul in his letter to the Ephesians urge us to learn that lesson 'today, here and now, at this very moment'.

We need to remember that nothing else in life can satisfy us except Jesus, the Bread of life. Look at the life of Jesus: Though He was in the form of God, He emptied Himself and became one among us to become the Bread of life. He was born in a manger at

Bethlehem to become the Eucharist for you and me. When Jesus prayed facing downward on the ground, "My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me!", it was to be the life giving bread for all of us. Gathering His inner circle of friends for the Passover meal in the upper room, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to them and said: "Take and eat it, this is my body." He did that in order to be really and truly present in the form of a little bread for each of us. Jesus had to undergo the most excruciating pain at the hands of his enemies and finally accepted the most painful death ever invented by man in order to remain the living bread who alone would satisfy our hunger. He is really and truly present whenever we gather together for the Eucharist. The question is: "Do we recognize Him in the breaking of the bread and do we welcome him into our hearts and into our lives?"

William Barclay tells us that when Admiral Lord Nelson was buried in St Paul's Cathedral, a party of his sailors carried his body high into the cathedral. His coffin was draped with a magnificent Union Jack. Later they carried his body to the graveside. One who saw the scene

writes, "With reverence and with efficiency, they lowered the body of the world's greatest admiral into its tomb. Then as though answering to a sharp order from the quarter-deck, they all seized the Union Jack with which the coffin had been covered and tore it to fragments, and each took his souvenir of the illustrious dead." All their lives that little bit of colored cloth would speak to them of the admiral they had loved. "I've got a piece of him," they said, "and I'll never forget him."

Well, in a sense, when we leave this Church today after receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, each of us will take Jesus with us and convey the spiritual nourishment we have received from Jesus to others as we come into contact with them. In this Sacrament God comes to us spiritually and physically and touches each of us and says, "I love you." He alone touches and satisfies our deepest needs. He alone allows us to reach out and touch one another.

Let Jesus into your life and you will never be hungry or thirsty again. And having been touched by Him, may we be able to reach out to those in need. God bless you all, **Amen.**