

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - August 1, 2021**

### **Deacon Jim Olshefski**

"The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron;" "What can you do [for us]?" These two sentences from today's readings, the first from Exodus and the latter from the Gospel according to John, clearly indicate that we, as a race of beings, like to grumble; we're a bunch of whiners. Whiners are all around us:

- My wife, Mary, is a **winer**...but before you take offense at me, let me explain. Mary meets every Wednesday afternoon with a group of her friends for fellowship; they also enjoy a glass (or two) of wine together. They refer to themselves as "the **winers**," that is, "**winers**" without the "h."
- But then, there's the group of leaders that I worked with over the last two weeks at Scout camp. After night one of sleeping in tents, they commented—OK, they whined; that's whine with an "h"—about being kept up throughout the night by the mooing of the cows that were pastured about a half-mile away; sound travels far in the stillness of a rural night. However, a couple of nights later, I was told that at 12:03AM, just after midnight, from the same general direction as the cows of two nights earlier, a Jimi Hendrix-wanna-be on electric guitar, a very loud electric guitar, played Purple Haze for over an hour. After listening to their whining the next morning, I told them, "Bet you wish you had the cows back, eh!"

So, in today's readings, we are confronted with people who like to complain:

- The early Israelites in the desert who were hungry and didn't trust, didn't have faith in the Lord, but God didn't get angry with them; rather, he gave them quail and manna to eat. Similarly...
- In the Gospel, which is a continuation of last week's Gospel passage on the feeding of the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, we heard the crowd following Jesus asking for more. More of Jesus's teachings? No; they wanted more food!

Those leaders at camp, the Israelites in the desert and the crowd chasing Jesus looking for more food...they have a lot in common. They were never satisfied; they hungered for more, for something different. They were locked into their own self-centered world.

The values espoused in our secular culture today make it easy for us to be like them. Those cultural values are focused on me...me...me. But, in reality, the world is not about me, it's about all of us, God's children all.

That's why Jesus in today's Gospel tells us that the remedy for hunger is not about working for that which perishes but for that which endures to eternal life; and that which endures is faith in Him, Jesus, "the bread of life." Each time we receive the Eucharist, "the bread of life," we become a sharer in the life of Christ, the Son of God, who loves us so much that He stretched out His arms on the cross and gave of Himself without reservation. I've heard it said that St. Augustine would often end Mass by saying to his flock: "Be what you eat." (Similarly, I, as deacon, am telling you the same thing at the dismissal from Mass, when I use my preferred dismissal: "Go in peace; glorifying the Lord by your life.") Whenever we receive the Eucharist, may we be that loving Christ-like presence in our world. May we be motivated by a joyful gratitude for what we already have and by a constant concern for the needs of others, particularly those less fortunate than us. May we attend, not only to our own hungers, but to the hungers of those in our world who suffer from empty stomachs, aching hearts and lonely spirits crying out for help.