Every day He humbles Himself just as He did when from from His heavenly throne into the Virgin's womb; every day He comes to us and lets us see Him in lowliness, when He descends from the bosom of the Father into the hands of the priest at the altar. **Francis of Assisi**

Francis of Assisi

August 18th **The Shofar** John 6

**The Bread of Life is what it claims to be**

Not all that long ago a woman at church came up to me with a not-too-friendly look on her face and told me she was tired of the "negative" things on which I had been preaching. They were things such as the command of Jesus to *repent* (and the message in the Greek was he was calling for a life of repentance and not just a one off). Then are a multitude of uplifting promises in the Sermon on the Mount but it would be an injustice to our Lord to leave out the bits that demanded a radical transformation in the way we live our lives – the whole of our lives- under God. It would be wrong to soak up all of the warm and fuzzy messages of the Gospel and leave out the need to travel the steep, winding, rocky and demanding way of living in the Kingdom if we are to be walking with Jesus. Some would like to leave out the cross and take the bodies of Our Lord from that same cross because who wants to think about his suffering and death when we can spend so much more of our lives dancing around in the glorious joys of the Resurrection? As Jesus told his disciples, to be a follower means to drink the cup he drinks from and to endure the spears and sufferings that in genuine Kingdom living will come our way.

This is why I want to run around in the rain (yes it is raining here) singling Alleluia! Alleluia! Chapter 6 of John's Gospel is just the message our world needs to be hearing from us and seeing in us.

! AM the Bread of Life

Jesus lets rip at the Jews who had come to trap him and to challenge every point of his teaching. They "grumbled" at what he was saying.

That word "grumbled" has a pedigree in Hebrew where it means to fret and to complain (think of the Hebrew people in the desert during the Exodus). But the Hebrew goes a lot further by also bringing in the idea of irrationality, of their objections having no foundation in truth, in reality. It rises up out of self-importance and from a very narrow way of thinking and looking at things. Grumbling leaves God out.

In the wilderness the people were "grumbling" out of a lack of faith, from not having a broader understanding of all God was doing to them and through them. All they could see from that narrow "now" and "Me" perspective was God feeding their bodily needs. Andwith that as a perspective all they wanted was more.

When God's great miracles were performed for them they sang their "alleluias" and praised God. But they thought those miracles were being performed just for them. Just to feed their hunger. I could not find anywhere in the desert where they asked Moses "why is this happening to us?", All they thought about was their own miraculous feeding, as if it was just a sign for them, a gift for that small band of people. How precious they thought they were.

Putting aside their self absorbed view on life, they should have been able to see how the miracles God was performing for them were ways of building their own faith. Having seen and experienced the merciful love of God in their own lives, they were to proclaim that divine goodness to others. God was not just feeding their physical needs. But they could not see it. They did not see it.

Having been fed, the people then go on to whinge and complain about being thirsty! After all they had seen; after all that had been done to them they could not have faith enough to leave all else to God. They could not hand over their thirstiness into the hands of a God who had done so mu0ch for them, who was leading them to the land of milk and honey.

**Keep your eyes on the bigger picture**

It all so very easy for us to view everything that comes our way as something of importance for the present. For the "now" of my existence. The wider context the Hebrew people failed to understand out there in the

wilderness what how they were a part of a much bigger, much more momentous plan of God. This is why, when things began to become a little difficult or painful they complained. They grumbled because of their massive self-absorbing understanding of faith. What they had forgotten was how God, in fulfilling the promise he made to their father Avraham, was bringing about a rejuvenated, a restored, redeemed and revitalised world. He was acting to undo the harm done by the sin of Adam and the Jewish people were called and chosen by God to collaborate in that plan.

Because they were hungry. Because they were thirsty they turned to the very human, age old response of grumbling. Indeed, there were even some who were so convinced God was going to leave them to die there in the wilderness that they tossed around the idea of returning to the place of their former lives as slaves!

### Jesus is manna on steroids

Sadly, we live in an era in Church history where we can begin to appear more like those ancient Jews than the disciples Jesus calls us to be and to become. We can find ourselves so overwhelmed by the present dangers, the cacophony of voices that pull us and shove us along ways contrary to the Gospel that we can lose perspective.

The present challenges and dangers can always be so immediately threatening and time consuming that we have to put aside the requirements of the Kingdom of God and take on responsibility for sorting these 'urgent" things first. We claim that it is not that we lack faith but it is because there are so many things we need to do, to appease God to take up and finish that our time for Christ is limited.

This is the meaning of the Hebrew word for "grumble". We use it as a get-out-of-gaol-free card and move on quickly to the next day as if all we had done was righteous and faithful.

This is where the invitation of the Gospel is both so life enriching and life transforming but is tough for us to take it on in its fullness. It challenges the way we think about being Christians in the world of today. We are drawn out of the erroneous thinking that God is transforming and renewing creation for me, ***for*** us into understanding how God is renewing and transforming the world ***through*** us. We are collaborators in the saving works of God and not inactive recipients of what Jesus Christ has done for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

We should now be in a position to appreciate the glorious power and majesty of what Jesus is doing and saying in today's Gospel. He is not simply feeding us with this new form of manna. He is declaring unequivocally that **He IS** the bread that has come down from heaven. It is not a matter of him saying that bread of heaven is out there somewhere, or that it can be found in what we might do as his disciples.

Jesus ***IS*** **THE BREAD OF LIFE**. Yes, all in capital letters because it is so deliciously and radically life enlivening. We eat his Body in the Eucharist. It is his true and full body not "by faith" but because Jesus declared it to be. The wine is his blood. Not "by faith" but because Jesus said it is. It does not depend on our understanding of how it is, or why it is. Jesus just declares that it is.

This transformation of the whole of creation then, is something God is doing in our hearts, in our souls in the very DNA of our existence. Instead of being hung up on the verbs "eating" and "drinking" and on how that can be possible – which is what the Jews were doing – we need to pause and allow God to do in this bread and wine what it is he wants to be doing. The words we have are the very words of Jesus himself so why second guess them?

Glory be to God that the Almighty is feeding us the food of life, the food that will sustain us for our mission of divine collaboration as well as the food that will empower us into eternal life. We need to steer our lives and our reflections into a wider perspective than what is happening now, than what has just happened or what it is we are struggling with at the coming moments.

As with the Exodus, Jesus calls us to see the bigger picture of what God is doing and not just how I am feeling. Were we to use the power of the Bread of Life (the Divine Body and Blood of the Lord we celebrate in the Eucharist – Mass – Holy Communion) then the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against us. "Come eat" says Jesus.