

Sunday Homily

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

8 AUGUST 2021

YEAR B

“Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.”

John 6:35

Illustration

Perhaps you have seen the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. Set in an American prison, it deals with themes of redemption and hope and what it means to be free. At one point in it, the character Red describes what it means to be institutionalised: “These walls are funny. First you hate them, then you get used to them, and then you depend on them; that’s institutionalised.” When Red is finally released he finds, as he feared, that freedom is unnerving and cruel. His mind is so shaped by the years of imprisonment that it is difficult for him to act as a free man. He even considers reoffending in order to get back to the relative security of institutional life. Red finds that even when his body is free, his mind is telling him that he is still in prison.

Gospel Teaching

Freedom, redemption and hope are also at the heart of Christ’s message, and it is no less tricky for us to understand what it is to be free than it was for Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*. There are many things that oppress and imprison us, but perhaps the thing that represents our captivity most completely is our need for food and drink. Even if we are not held behind bars, or made to work as slaves, we can never be free from the fact that before we do anything else, we need to make sure that we and our families have enough to eat. So when Jesus announces himself to be the bread of life, he strikes right at the heart of that which holds us captive as human beings. He declares that the bottom line of our existence is not our need for food and drink, but our need for Christ.

This was a daring statement to make, and, not surprisingly, it was followed by cries of protest: who on earth was this local boy, after all, to say such outrageous things? In the verses following our reading, we learn that even those who had supported him began to drift away. John crafts his Gospel to help his readers to see who Jesus is, and to put their faith in him; but it was never going to be an easy decision. Through faith in Christ we have unimaginable gifts, but they are not always easy gifts to receive. For starters, even the most committed believers still have to feed themselves. We are all still captive to our human needs; they still shape how we think and act.

So what kind of freedom is it that we have through Christ? Is it a spiritual freedom that exists despite our physical and mental constraints? Or is it a freedom that

comes into effect only when we are finally free of our earthly bodies after we die? It is both these things, and yet more. A freedom that exists only in a spiritual realm does not have the completeness of the kind of freedom Christ meant to bring. When Jesus declares himself to be the bread of life, he is effectively saying that his freedom operates at the heart of our everyday lives; at the heart of what it means to be human. It is a freedom that changes how we live in the here and now, and not just one that exists only on a spiritual level, or only in the hereafter.

Application

As Christians we all know what it is to struggle with the contradiction of our human constraints and our spiritual freedom. It may be that we are amply provided with food and drink; but we all know what it means to have to pay bills on time, please the boss, complete assignments and care for our family and friends.

And as Red found in *The Shawshank Redemption*, years of captivity shape your mind. The trick is not just to live differently, but to think differently. And for Christians, the means to achieve this is to feed on the bread of life. Christ has set us free; he has opened the prison doors. In this world we can live as if we are free, or we can live as if we are captive. Let's pray that we may find the courage to feed on Christ (and courageous it is), and in doing so to be truly free, even in the midst of the captivity of the humdrum constraints of our everyday lives.