



## The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – August 2009

### The Bread of Life

**T**HE SUNDAY Mass Lectionary gives us Matthew, Mark and Luke as Years A, B and C and throws in bits of John as we go along. Mark being quite a bit shorter than Matthew and Luke, we end up with more John than usual in this year, Year B, the Year of Mark. In particular, during the summer we read John 6, the chapter where Jesus himself tells us what the Eucharist means. The chapter starts on 26<sup>th</sup> July and continues on Sundays until the end of August (except for 16<sup>th</sup> August where the Assumption, with its special readings takes precedence). I hope that you will do your best to hear this chapter read aloud in church and to study it at home. Who knows, it could be a useful subject for a one-off August study group – perhaps at an EFG or in an established parish group that normally rests in the summer?

It is no accident that 'bread' became a slang word for money, the 'breadline' a description of what you need in order to survive, and 'daily bread', from the Lord's Prayer, a catchphrase to sum up variously our food, our livelihood, our bible reading and, for St Augustine of Hippo and many Christians ever since, being fed day-by-day by the Mass. The 'Bread of Life, John 6 tells us, is the one who comes down from God, Jesus himself, which means that nothing in our lives is more important, therefore, than our regular study of the Word of God – learning about Jesus – and our regular receiving of the Word of God – being fed on the Body of Christ, the Bread of Life.

The Year of Priests, just inaugurated, puts us in mind of the Curé d'Ars (1786-1859), the most celebrated – and yet the most humble – of village priests. We keep his feast day on 4<sup>th</sup> August, the day he died 'in post'. The best-loved story of St John Vianney was that, when asked why he just sat saying nothing in front of the tabernacle, he said of the Lord that 'he looks at me and I look at him'. This devotion to the Bread of Life, to the Lord himself, is at the heart of our spirituality and, though its reality does not depend on anything we ourselves do, we must constantly stir up our own longing, and inform our own understanding, if we are going to be truly receptive to its saving power. It is no exaggeration to say that a characteristic of parishes which grow, and which engender vocations, is that these are places where adoration of the Eucharist is firmly established.

Whatever else we do this August, let us spend some time praying, reading, and thinking about the mystery of God tabernacling in our midst, the Bread of Life.

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