

## **What Must We Do to Perform the Works of God?**

**Ex. 16: 2-4, 12-15, 31a; Ps. 78; Eph. 4: 17, 20-24; Jn. 6: 24-35**

Last week, we heard about Jesus feeding the crowd of five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The people were so impressed that they continued to follow Jesus.

But Jesus knew that they were impressed for the wrong reason. He knew that they were amazed because their physical need had been addressed miraculously but He wanted to teach them about their spiritual needs; not the hunger of their bodies but the hunger of their souls. He wanted them to know that not only could He overcome their physical hunger, as He had proven, but He could address their spiritual hunger and preserve their souls for eternity. He tells them: 'I am the bread of life'; not the bread that will curb hunger, but the bread of life itself.

This seemed to go over the heads of the people because they changed the subject. They asked Him: 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' In other words: 'What must we do to please God?'

In response, Jesus tells them: '...believe in Him whom He has sent.' The only work that God wants is for the people to believe in Jesus. But after all that He had done, including recently feeding them so abundantly beginning with so little, the people asked Him to give them another sign so that they might believe in Him. For so many people, this is typical of our skepticism when faced with something supernatural; something beyond our comprehension. We want to be given further proof to help our understanding so that we may believe.

The significance of those seven words that Jesus uttered cannot be overstated. Their significance was likely lost on the Jewish people and may be lost on many of us today. There is a common misconception that our salvation may be gained by working for it. In other words, we have to work our way to heaven by doing good works. But Jesus clearly says that the only work is to believe in Him; to have faith in Him. Faith is the key.

Many people point to the passage from the Matthew's Gospel, ch. 25, v. 31-46, to prove that we must do good works to be considered worthy to be taken into heaven. Jesus describes the final judgement and speaks about the separation of the sheep from the goats with the sheep going up to heaven while the goats are banished to hell. He says that the separation will be done on the basis of whether or not we feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, nurse the sick, visit the imprisoned, and so on.

But we must meditate on this Gospel passage in the context of the times when Jesus mentioned the need for faith in Him and also the numerous times when St. Paul, in his letters, clearly states that our salvation comes through faith in Jesus and not through good works (eg. Eph. 2: 9).

So how do we rationalize the commandment of Jesus in Matthew 25 to perform good works with the notion that our salvation rests only in our faith in Jesus? If we believe in Jesus, we will follow His commands. But also, our belief in Jesus out of the love He showed us in giving up His life on the Cross. And in response to this great act of love, we respond in love by believing in Him and following His command to love the least of His brothers and sisters and, in so doing, we 'perform the works of God.'