

George Lucas says movies are binary. Lucas, you recall, directed the Star Wars movies and now helps produce special effects in almost every motion picture. A binary system is a system of zeroes and ones. Your porch light, for example, is binary because either it's off or it's on. Lucas says every movie is either a zero or a one and movie makers can't really be sure which when they start off. They may invest a lot of time, money, and effort into a product that turns out to be a zero. The better you can predict which way a movie idea may go, the more prosperous you can be.

Jesus says food is binary. It's either a zero or a one. Either it perishes or it lasts forever. The crowd, filled with loaves and fish from the miraculous multiplication, pursues Jesus to see what else he can do. To them he's a magician, an entertainer, and a free meal. Jesus says that food perishes. Don't invest all your efforts into a zero - if what you think is Christ is merely fascination over a cheap trick.

Behind this story lies the episode from the Old Testament Book of Exodus we heard in the first reading. Moses was leading Israel across the desert into the Promised Land, but they had a few glitches - like no transportation, no water, and no food. No problem. God provided food from heaven, a bread they called manna. Jesus argues that God has power to provide bread that gives life to the world. This food is a one. It's worth going after.

Sometimes we're like the crowd. We pursue the wrong thing because it fascinates us - a politician who convinces us, a fashion that bequeles us. Sometimes we follow those who offer hope. Sometimes we prefer those who feed us with resentment. Often the lure is religious - a slick preacher, an alleged apparition, or a promise which pleases the ear - yet it leads us away from Christ, as the multiplication of the loaves made some place false faith in him.

It's not easy to discern which food is perishable and which is eternal. The crowd stood face to face with Jesus in the midst of one of his miracles and they still missed the point. Being religious is not being gullible. It's ~~the~~ searching for religious food, the bread that gives life.