

## 17<sup>th</sup> Sun OT – x of loaves and fish – July 29, 2018

For those who didn't hear me preach last weekend, I wanted to remind you all where I am going for the next five weeks. The Church reads through this fundamentally important Scripture passage from St. John's Gospel, c. 6, divided up into five parts because it is a very long chapter.

It's the story of Jesus unfolding His teaching on the greatest gift that He has ever given to the Church and continues to give to the Church: His own Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, which renews the saving sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary at each and every holy Mass and makes it present among us.

It's so important that I'm going to be summarizing this in the bulletins and on the parish website if you want to come back to it, and as we move into fall, we'll also be having some adult faith formation opportunities to learn more about how important the Eucharist is in our lives.

We want to take some time with it. It is such a deep, beautiful and mind-boggling mystery that Jesus breaks it in into steps, unfolding the mystery little by little and teaching it to His Apostles so they can teach us.

The first step is the sign – the miracle we might call it – of Jesus' divine power. That's the part we hear today, where Jesus multiplies the loaves and the fish so that people understand that He is not just an ordinary rabbi or even prophet, but God Himself.

Over the next few weeks, we'll move on to how He explains that it is much more than just a sign, that for centuries the Father has been preparing their spiritual ancestors for His coming and this gift of the Eucharist, and – as hard as it is to believe – that we have to eat the true Body and drink the true Blood of Jesus to have Divine Life within us and to have the happiness of eternal life. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's just dive in to some of the details of today's part of the story, because every line and every detail tells us something important about the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament:

We start by noticing that a huge crowd follows Jesus, curious about just Who this guy is. But when He goes up the mountain, only the few, His Disciples, follow Him, because it is hard work to climb a mountain. That is something we should never forget. Following Jesus is challenging. He never promises us that it is going to be a walk in the park. He tells us frequently in the Gospels that we have to pick up our Cross to follow Him. We'll see that later when a lot of people leave Jesus because they think the teaching on the Eucharist is just too hard.

Next, there is the line about the feast of the Passover being near. That is not a throwaway line: The feast of the Passover, for observant Jews, was a very big deal. Just as many of us spend a huge amount of time and effort preparing for Christmas, it was the same then with Passover. There was an intense preparation period as people got ready to travel to Jerusalem. The timing of this miracle is not an accident. The Passover was the annual remembrance of the Jewish people that God freed them from slavery in Egypt and allowed them to pass through the Red Sea, freed from the death that befell the Egyptians, to reach the promised land.

So Jesus was showing by this sign that He was going to change the Passover forever. More than just a *remembrance* of God's saving power, at the Last Supper He would do something totally radical: He would make a *new* Passover that was God's saving power in action and in the flesh. So that it wouldn't be just a ritual, but the very core of our relationship with Him.

The next thing we notice is that Jesus, as the Son of God, can do anything He wants – with or without us. But He *chooses* to use His disciples to be the agents of His miracle. To draw Andrew and Philip into the act, so to speak. But not without teaching them a lesson first. St. John reminds us that He is testing Philip the Apostle with His questions. He sees this crowd of 5,000 hungry, irritated men and asks Philip – how can we possibly buy enough food to eat??? Jesus knows the answer: *We can't*. And that's the point. He is teaching Phillip that he can *not* rely on his own talents or material or worldly resources to provide the love and Providence of God. For that, He has to rely on the power of Jesus Himself.

The next thing we notice is that, as the Divine Son of God, Jesus can solve the hunger problem any way he wants. This is the same Jesus that created out of nothing at the beginning of the world. He could have just made food appear instantaneously, or even just willed food directly into their bellies without them having to eat.

But He doesn't want to do that. Jesus wants to use the good things that He created in nature to extend His love and His presence. To allow us to share and participate in the work. So he takes the measly amount of barley loaves and fish and transforms them and multiplies them by His sacred power into a feast for thousands.

It is much the same with the Holy Mass. Our Lord and Savior could let us share in His holy sacrifice any way He wants. But He chooses to allow us to participate. To give the bread and wine – symbolic of the good things of the earth that He gives us and the work and labor we add – to give back to Him. And then He does the rest. *He* shares with a priest His divine power to transform that into His true Body and Blood.

Next, we see in the story the extraordinary overflowing abundance of the love of God. Jesus could simply multiply exactly enough food to prevent their hunger. But He multiplies in a super-generous, profligate way, showing that His love and Providence know no bounds.

And even the lines that there was more than they could eat and that there was food left over is significant. It's a symbol of the fact that there is far, far more to this mystery of Jesus giving us His own Body and Blood than we can possibly take in in "one sitting." That is why we come back, week in and week out, to this great mystery of the Eucharist. For those who keep their hearts open to the mystery, it is never being – that is, if we understand that it is a mystery – because we can receive more new grace every time we share in His Holy Body and Blood. .

Sadly, not every Catholic is ready to try to grasp that. In the story, some people exclaim, "He is the Prophet come into the world." No, He is much, much more than that. He is the one the prophets point to – the presence of God in the flesh.

In a very similar way, we should renew our efforts to see the Mass as much more than a community meal – but the very life-blood of our existence, the food for eternal life.

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 110

### Reading 1

[2 KGS 4:42-44](#)

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A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, and fresh grain in the ear.

Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat."

But his servant objected,

"How can I set this before a hundred people?"

Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat."

"For thus says the LORD,

"They shall eat and there shall be some left over."

And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

### Responsorial Psalm

[PS 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18](#)

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R. (cf. 16) **The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.**

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,  
and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your might.

R. **The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.**

The eyes of all look hopefully to you,  
and you give them their food in due season;  
you open your hand

and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

R. **The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.**

The LORD is just in all his ways  
and holy in all his works.

The LORD is near to all who call upon him,  
to all who call upon him in truth.

R. **The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.**

### Reading 2

[EPH 4:1-6](#)

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Brothers and sisters:

I, a prisoner for the Lord,  
urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,  
with all humility and gentleness, with patience,  
bearing with one another through love,

striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:  
one body and one Spirit,  
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;  
one God and Father of all,  
who is over all and through all and in all.

### **Alleluia**[LK 7:16](#)

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**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

A great prophet has risen in our midst.  
God has visited his people.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

### **Gospel**

[JN 6:1-15](#)

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Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee.  
A large crowd followed him,  
because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick.  
Jesus went up on the mountain,  
and there he sat down with his disciples.  
The Jewish feast of Passover was near.  
When Jesus raised his eyes  
and saw that a large crowd was coming to him,  
he said to Philip,  
"Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"  
He said this to test him,  
because he himself knew what he was going to do.  
Philip answered him,  
"Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough  
for each of them to have a little."  
One of his disciples,  
Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,  
"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish;  
but what good are these for so many?"  
Jesus said, "Have the people recline."  
Now there was a great deal of grass in that place.  
So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.  
Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,  
and distributed them to those who were reclining,  
and also as much of the fish as they wanted.  
When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples,  
"Gather the fragments left over,  
so that nothing will be wasted."  
So they collected them,  
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments

from the five barley loaves  
that had been more than they could eat.  
When the people saw the sign he had done, they said,  
"This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."  
Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off  
to make him king,  
he withdrew again to the mountain alone.