

Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time
July 26, 2015
2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145; Eph 4:1-6; John 6:1-15

It may seem a little strange at first that in the year of Mark, we would suddenly find ourselves listening to a reading from the Gospel according to John. Well, there are two very good reasons for this sudden change.

First, the Gospel of Mark, being the shortest of the Gospels, isn't quite long enough to cover all of the Sundays of Ordinary Time in year B. Secondly, as a result we're then given the wonderful opportunity of spending five Sundays on the sixth chapter of John that includes the feeding of the five thousand and the Bread of Life discourse.

Mark's gospel is very fluid and the characters have been on the move and now we come to sudden halt to reflect on Jesus as the Bread of Life. And as there is no other chapter in the Lectionary that rates five whole weeks of attention, we can be sure that there is something very special about the sixth chapter of John.

The feeding of the five thousand is found in all four Gospels, but John's version has aspects that aren't found in Matthew, Mark or Luke. For example: Only in John's version does Jesus himself distribute the bread after giving thanks to God. And it's also only in John that Jesus commands that the fragments be gathered up in baskets.

Another clue that this rendition of the multiplication of loaves and fish is of great importance to John...and us as well...is that this sign takes place on a mountain. Whenever great things are happening in Scripture, if it's happening on a mountain you can bet it's REALLY important. Think of Moses on Mt. Sinai, or the Sermon on the Mount or the Transfiguration as good examples.

In today's passage, and throughout chapter 6, we're going to hear allusions to the Passover, Moses, and manna in the desert. Now it's not John's intent to draw comparisons with those stories but to show that Jesus *is* the new Passover, and that Jesus is someone far *greater* than Moses and that while the people of Israel were fed with Manna, the bread that Jesus gives is the true Bread of Life.

And while we heard in our first reading that Elisha was able to feed a hundred with his barley loaves, Jesus was able to feed over 5000 people with 12 baskets to spare...a symbolic number of completion that means there is enough bread for all...including you and me. Jesus was not simply repeating events from the past, he was introducing something entirely new...and we'll spend the next five weeks learning what that "something new" is and what it means for our lives as Catholics.

Notice too how we never learn the name of the young man who gave up his loaves and fish to Jesus in a great act of charity. John does that on purpose...whenever a character in his Gospel goes un-named, that person represents everybody. In this case, the young man's willingness to give all that he had is an invitation to us to do the same.

Even if we have nothing more to give to others than the love and joy we have in Jesus and our Faith, then we are to give that without holding anything back. That kind of selfless giving demonstrated by the young man is the very essence and heart of discipleship.

The twelve baskets of barley loaves left over have a deeper meaning than the people present were able to comprehend at the time. As with all of John's signs, true understanding won't happen until after Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The

obvious symbol of the twelve baskets represents the twelve tribes of Israel, but they also represent the gathering of the fragmented Christians into one basket so that one day all will be gathered in unity at the heavenly Eucharistic table.

The Body and Blood of Jesus keeps us strong. He gives us the strength to proclaim his Kingdom. We need to ask ourselves at communion time: "What am I doing?" Am I just following the crowd? Hopefully not. Am I receiving some sort of blessing? Hopefully. But hopefully we realize that communion is much more than a blessing. What is it that we are doing when we receive communion? We are receiving the Food that God provides. Today we pray for a deeper appreciation, a deeper reverence for the great gift of Love that is the Eucharist.