

## 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time + 28 July 2024 + John 6:1-15

Starting today and for the next 4 weekends, our Gospel readings will all be taken from John chapter 6. It is rare that we spend so much time on just one chapter, which means that the Church must think that this particular chapter is very important. And in fact, it is an extremely important chapter, as evidenced by the fact that the miracle of the 5 loaves and 2 fish is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. So let's look at this miracle in detail.

First, we should refresh our memories of the Old Testament, which includes a number of stories of miraculous feedings. For example, Moses the prophet intercedes for the Israelites in the desert when they had no food, and the LORD provides them with *bread from heaven*--with 'manna' from above. And as we heard in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading today, Elisha the prophet multiplies 20 barley loaves so as to feed 100 men, with some bread even being left over. So by multiplying bread to feed the crowds, Jesus is revealing Himself to be in the line of the greatest prophets of the OT. This is why the people say that He was *truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world*, the Saviour, the Messiah, as was foretold by Moses. If you recall, we spoke about Jesus being the true, definitive Prophet a few weeks ago in the Gospel where when He was rejected by His own extended family and neighbors.

Moving on, today's miracle also points forward to what will also become more evident as we dive even deeper into John ch. 6: the multiplication of the loaves anticipates the Last Supper and the institution of the Holy Eucharist. We know this because St. John very purposely frames this miracle by noting: *the Jewish feast of Passover was near*. And the Last Supper Eucharist was itself a Passover meal. At the Passover, Jews eat unleavened bread and lamb, to keep alive the memory of how God set them free from slavery and death in Egypt. But the Last Supper was the final, most complete Passover, because there Jesus will offer *Himself* as bread, and *He Himself* becomes *the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world*.

We also know that this miracle is an anticipation of the Eucharist because John records here the same words as Christ will use at the Last Supper. That is, *Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed (or gave) them*. Which is why these same words are used in the Consecration at every Mass, where Jesus performs the greatest miracle: He feeds us with His body in the form of bread and wine. This is not just a symbol. It is not just a nice memorial meal, but the real presence of Christ: His Body, Blood, soul and divinity. Like our Gospel today, it is a miracle. We may not completely understand it, and that's fine. If God wants to act in ways, every now and then, that are beyond our understanding, He certainly can do it!

Another aspect of this miracle I would like to zero in on is found at the very end of today's Gospel, where we hear Jesus tell the disciples to *gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted*. Now, the Greek word for "wasted" here, I believe, is better translated as *lost* or *perish*, as it is in other translations of the Bible. Because Jesus is not really concerned about being wasteful here. After all, he could easily multiply more bread! Rather, the *gathering* of even the fragments of this miracle into 12 baskets, with none *lost*, is meant to reveal that Jesus is truly the Messiah: the One who will finally gather to Himself the scattered 12 tribes of Israel, and, by extension, *all* of the perishing people of the world into His Church, in order to save us, and to lead us to communion with the Father and to our heavenly home!

I highlight this gathering of the lost here because it is so important to our faith. That is, just as Jesus gathers and feeds the crowds in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and later in the Holy Eucharist, so the Church He formed is Catholic, meaning universal—She is for all people. We are united not only across the whole world in *one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism* (as we hear in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians); but even more, we are united this way with all Catholics through Christian history. We are part of a chain of believers that has held an unbroken faith for some 2,000 years now. And the Body of Christ we receive at every Mass is the same body of Christ offered at the Last Supper, broken on the Cross, and risen into glory!

And so every time we celebrate the Mass, we should remember what it means to be Catholic. It means that we are celebrating in union with each other as parishioners. We celebrate in union with our diocese, and with the Church throughout the whole world. We celebrate in union with the Pope and the college of Bishops—the successors of the Apostles. We should be especially mindful of those who celebrate the Mass in great danger to their very lives: the persecuted Church. We celebrate in union with all Catholics who have believed since the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ. And we are called to extend this invitation into Covenantal union, into *Communion*, with all who do not yet share this faith.

But that's not all. We also celebrate in union with the angels and Saints in heaven, who surround the very throne of God and never cease to cry out in worship, *Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Hosts!* They enjoy now what we see only in part: the wedding feast of the Lamb in Heaven. And their worship of the King of Kings is the perfect model for us. In our Gospel today, we hear that the crowds wanted to carry Jesus off and make Him king. But it wasn't yet the appointed time for that in the moment: He first had to be crowned with thorns. But now, He reigns as Lord. When we leave this place, let us carry Him off as the King our hearts, and Lord of all.