

The Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary time B

Jn 6:1-15

Dear Friends,

Right in the middle of our journey with Mark, we take time to consider selections of John's Discourse on the Bread of Life in his marvelous chapter six. These readings will be our Gospel text for the next five Sundays.

There are two major themes in this remarkable teaching of John. The chapter has two interwoven themes on Jesus: the life-giving revelation from heaven and the life-giving bread from heaven. It centers on Jesus as Word and Sacrament. Only verses 51-58 are explicitly about the Eucharist though implications of the Eucharist appear often in this special chapter.

Today's story of the loaves and fishes appears six times in the four Gospels. It has its roots in the Old Testament and it points toward the Eucharist. It is a powerful display of the theme of divine hospitality of the kingdom. In John's version, Jesus himself feeds the people. The fourth Gospel stresses, in this way, that the people receive the nourishment directly and abundantly from Jesus.

The obvious connection to the feeding of the multitude is the manna in the desert. Likewise, right after the similar desert feast in John, we have Jesus walking on the water. This is a shadow of the Israelites walking through the Reed Sea on the road to freedom.

The story of the boy with the few loaves and fishes is another lesson for us. God often uses little people and meager gifts and talents to produce wonderful results.

The youngster's sharing opens up the gifts of life to all. Through the sharing, a scarcity is transformed into abundance. At the same time, the limits on the food avoid over-consumption. This is a great lesson for us today in a world suffering from the distorted distribution of food and all other resources. Billions of dollars are spent on diets while millions go to bed hungry every evening.

Jesus' action should lead us to examine our lifestyle. Our consumer-driven world naturally moves to overconsumption, neglect of the poor and the continuing mutilation of our environment.

Jesus' command to gather the leftovers has a double message for us. At one level, it challenges everything about our lifestyle. At a different level, it calls the

disciples into a role of sharing the Bread of Life that is the Eucharist with the Church.

All through these five Sundays with John 6 we are invited into the mystery of the Bread of Life. We meet Jesus once again. He is both the Word of revelation and the Bread of Life in the sacrament of the Eucharist. We need to encounter this design of God's love. It is crucial to avoid the superficial response of the crowd. They loved the bread but were clueless of the true meaning of Jesus' action. We need to enter more deeply into the event, the event that relates to the many hungers of our daily life. When we do, we will meet in Jesus one who goes far beyond what we want. He will bring order into the longings of our heart. Jesus, the Bread of life, will provide us with all that we need.