

## Body and Blood of Christ- 2019

Before launching into the theme today's Feast presents for us I think it would be helpful to recall the context for today's Gospel reading.

This episode takes place right after Jesus had sent his disciples out to teach and preach and heal in his name. That mission was wildly successful, and when the disciples returned Jesus took them to this deserted place so that they could rest, but also so that Jesus could unpack the experience with them. It was going to be a teaching moment.

Then the crowds came. So much for resting, right? But it was still a teaching moment. The teaching would just have to be adjusted a bit.

I'm sure the disciples thought they were doing everyone a favor by approaching Jesus and recommending that he dismiss the crowd so that they could go to the surrounding villages and farms to find lodging and provisions. They had experienced first-hand how mesmerizing Jesus' preaching could be and probably intuited that, as long as Jesus kept talking, no one was going to think about food or lodging.

Their idea was: "Wrap it up Jesus, so that the people could take care of their bodily needs."

But the teaching continues, and gets focused on the disciples. The disciples want to the people to have a chance to go beg food and lodging from the neighboring towns and farms. Jesus says, "Give them some food yourselves."

The disciples see that as an impossibility. There's not

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enough to go around. Jesus teaches them to simply offer up what they have to God, and let God do the rest. “He takes the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.”

That’s all the Gospel actually tells us. The next thing we know everyone ate and were satisfied, and there were even leftovers.

Six times in the Gospels we have this story in one form or another. It must have been pretty important, not only at the moment, but in the life of the church when the Gospels were being written.

I think that’s because of its enduring value, not only as an insight into the person of Jesus, but as an ongoing lesson about how to go about addressing the needs the church encounters as it goes through history.

In the latter the teaching really focuses on the approaches to overwhelming need: beg off because our resources are not up to the task; or, make available what we have and let God take it from there.

Almost hidden from view is the fact that someone gave up the five loaves of bread and the two fish with no indication that they were going to get them back. They were called to make a sacrifice and trust in the Lord. That’s how they contributed to what has all the markings of being a eucharistic moment.

Of course, Jesus and the sacrifice of his very body and blood is the center of every eucharistic moment, but it seems undeniable that we have our part to play. And that

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part has also to do with sacrifice. In the Eucharistic feast we are celebrating right now we contribute the sacrifices of our week along with the bread and wine so that all that we do can be taken up into God's act of saving the world.

In common parlance, you could say that we "have skin in the game."

Every sacrament of the church has that element to it: It's God's saving action which makes use of the contribution made by the church gathered. We have to put something in for the miracle of salvation to occur.

Because we celebrate this Sunday under the title of the Body and Blood of Christ we can emphasize the sacrificial offering that Jesus made for us to be saved. It is fitting that we do so.

But not to the point of overlooking the ongoing reality of what this feast celebrates: The sacrifice of Christ is made present again when the church gathers, takes, blesses, breaks, and shares that which it has received, not only in the context of the Mass but in the eucharistic moments that can take place in the world.

None of this is something we can see into from start to finish. It will always require the leap of faith—that what we put forward as our contribution to the sacrifice will be taken up into God's gracious action on behalf of all, us included.

That's the most basic way we participate in this feast, we ourselves as members of the Body of Christ.