

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

(Confirmation of Dominic Hendricks)

It's easy for us to focus on the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes that takes place in today's Gospel. But the context in which the miracle takes place is also important, and it reveals a pivotal characteristic of Jesus' way of going about things.

The event the immediately precedes this episode is the report on how it was that John the Baptist had lost his life. By the time Jesus began his ministry John was well known and had attracted even the attention of Herod Antipas, who really didn't know what to do with him. Herod recognized the truth of what John said but was also threatened by it and the esteem in which the people held him.

Given Herod's tendency toward pettiness and vengeance it was only a matter of time before John became a nuisance and Herod had him done away with. News of John's death was heart-breaking for anyone who looked forward to a more just and God-centered society. Jesus himself was taken aback by it and, as today's Gospel relates, felt the need to take some time away to refocus his ministry.

That's when the crowds found him. He had to abandon his plan to find some quiet in light of what he saw in the crowds, the "what do we do now?" question in their eyes, their mourning of the loss of so great a prophet.

The Gospel says Jesus was moved to "pity" and it's his compassion that dictates how things proceed from there. Jesus spent the whole day attending to the people. When the disciples reminded him that night that the people had not eaten, Jesus saw

that the opportunity had come to reveal the divine, nourishing power of self-emptying love. He invited his disciples to do what he had just done, to follow his example of unsparing generosity, even as they feared they had too little to offer.

Discipleship has very little to do with multiplying loaves and fishes. In my 64 years of Christian living, I haven't done that even once. Discipleship has everything to do, though, with going out of oneself, with letting compassion take root in our lives and to act from it.

When we celebrate the Eucharist we remember the compassion and self-emptying love of Jesus. The disciples saw a need and expected Jesus to send people off to fend for themselves. In a moment of crisis, Jesus allowed himself to be called forth by the needs of others.

A person who desires to complete the process of his Christian initiation needs to know that such a sacrificial commitment to the good of others is a central feature of Christian discipleship. It would be too daunting, though, to expect that we could do this on our own. Dominic, you are about to receive two sacraments, both designed to give you the means and to strengthen you to respond to the call of Gospel, the call to embrace the mission of Jesus.

By the power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit you will be sent out to proclaim the gospel primarily by the quality of the life you lead, in the private realm as well as in the marketplace. There is nowhere that Christian faith and practice cannot be transformative. St. Maximilian Kolbe, whose feast day we celebrate

later this month, found that to be true even in a concentration camp.

We can respond to the needs of being a transformative presence in the world if we take the trouble to receive the food for the journey that God has prepared for us. Eucharist, the church's most repeatable sacrament, is designed to keep us strong in service to God and our neighbor. The more you take part in it, the more you will long for it as the source of strength that helps you be faithful. The witness of people who come to Mass even when not obligated admits to no other explanation.

All the various journeys people make to the sacraments have meaning. In no case does a person ever miss the boat. Dom, you have made your journey to Confirmation and Eucharist without the aid of a peer group doing the same thing as you at the same time. In your case, there's no question of simply going along with what everyone else is doing.

You've had to think through your motivations, persist in your intentions even as your "program" of catechesis was being tailored to your particular situation. It seems unlikely to me, that given the amount of effort required, this would be something like a one-off event that will be quickly forgotten as you move into a new phase in life.

You've had an adult's chance to really delve into the meaning and value of the sacraments and know now, in a way not available, say, to a second grader or a high school student, how to make use of them on your Christian journey.

Today we are happy to welcome you to the eucharistic table, where Christ himself becomes the food for your journey here on out.

The call to discipleship does often appear to be more than we can manage, but you are not alone. Others will be there for you to join with in proclaiming the Gospel by how we live our lives. Take heart in the fact that it is the community of faith and all its members who are charged with being God's witnesses in a world charged with God's presence if only we know how to view it. You will now be a full-fledged member of that community.

Today you take your God-intended place in the sacramental life of the Church. The perspective it offers, and your appropriation, as an adult, of the gifts God is giving you will ensure that your witness to the Gospel will not go unnoticed.