



**Praying the Sunday Gospel  
Seventeenth Sunday of the Year  
Cycle B July 25, 2021  
John 6:1-15**

Editorial Note:

*The “B” year of the 3 year cycle is devoted to Mark’s Gospel but since his Gospel is shorter than Matthew and Luke, the liturgical arrangers of the lectionary needed “extra material” to compensate for the potentially “missing” weeks of the Marcan year. John Chapter 6 was chosen as a text to fill out those 5 weeks. We had just left*

*off at Mark 6:34, the scene of Jesus in a deserted place with a hungry crowd. John 6 picks up at this same point.*

The story of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes appears 6 times in the Gospels; obviously it was important to the early church. Often referred to as “multiplication” of loaves and fishes, it is better understood as the “distribution” of the loaves and fishes. In John’s Gospel it is one of the 7 “signs” of Jesus; John chooses not to call these events “miracles” because he wants to emphasize that they are manifestations of Jesus’ divine identify and these “signs” should be read “symbolically” so he came to experience the deeper meaning of the event.

Unlike the 5 other accounts, as John tells it this “sign”, Jesus himself takes the initiative in raising the question of the crowd’s hunger and then proceeding to “solve” the dilemma. Unlike the 5 other accounts of the feeding of the 5,000, in John 6, it is Jesus alone who distributes the bread directly: there is intimate, content between Jesus and each person. In fact, the disciples are part of the crowd, not “intermediaries” for they also need this “living bread.” Also, note Jesus does not “break” the bread; in John Jesus is the Passover Lamb and none of its bones were broken.

The disciples’ role is gathering the fragments in a sense we are the fragments, we are “what remains” of the sign/event. Also significant are the time and place: Passover and a deserted location. Phillip and Andrew represent the normal human reaction to the problem; buy bread or use the gift being offered by the young boy; but neither of these responses seem adequate or even realistic in the face of 5,000 men. Almost no human resources. Now the stage is set for a miracle or sign.

The story emphasizes the beginning (human insufficiency and God’s abundance) and the ending (12 baskets of fragments); the “middle” is missing. We are not told exactly “how” Jesus fed the 5,000. From where did all these loaves of bread and fish come?? Did they drop down from heaven like manna? Did people, moved by Jesus’ goodness and, the boy offering his loaves and fishes suddenly open their baskets and share?

Perhaps the omission of details in the middle of the story is to remind us that faith is not about knowing how God will provide but rather to the generosity of that God knows our hunger and will provide for us.

## **Points for Prayer and Reflection:**

- 1) The apostles Phillip and Andrew represent our natural human responses to situations in when we feel overwhelmed and inadequate. Even though Andrew is slightly more enthusiastic and hopeful than Phillip – noting the offering of the boy with loaves and fishes – nonetheless Phillip’s voice was probably trailing away to a whisper as he started to doubt his own suggestion that the boy’s offer might somehow help. Try to identify with these two apostles and their fears: what weighs you down right now? What is Jesus saying to you in your time of stress and uncertainty?
- 2) The boy with the basket of five loaves and two fish is intriguing: what prompted his generous offer? Would you have had the humility and courage to make such an offer? His limited resources became the “raw material” for an incredible chain reaction of good. Examine your own life-story: when have you been that cheerful and ready to give your “everything” to help the cause? How many people’s generosity has changed your life story or that of your family? In some ways this boy and Jesus became “partners” in the story! How are you a “partner” with God right now in some project or need being fulfilled?
- 3) Pray with Jesus offering you the bread very directly and personally; He stands before you and looks you in the eye asking how you need to be nourished or healed right now.
- 4) Jesus was giving much more than earthly bread; the food was just an “appetizer” for more profound conversations, intimacy and growing into a relationship with Him. Ask Jesus what he would like to give you and give him your openness to his gift.
- 5) The fragments left over represent all of us: we keep the miracle going as we give to the Lord all we are and all we have; then He will touch and transform and use us even beyond our imagining. Fragments never cease! Pray about that process.
- 6) Many times the miracles of Jesus challenge us to generosity or forgiveness; this miracle invites us to pray about the hunger of the world – spiritually and materially. What could you do about world hunger, even hunger in your own family? Pray for inspiration and courage to act on your prayer.
- 7) The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner reflected on this Gospel from the perspective of “wilderness” and “technology.” A key point of the story is that the people followed Jesus into a wilderness; they were desperate for a word of hope and perhaps a healing or two. But they were surprised by the gift of “free bread” and lots of it! So by the end of the passage they went to make Jesus king and he must withdraw by himself into a personal wilderness. We each have our personal “wilderness” or desert (loneliness, fear, limitations, anger) and want more bread but Jesus invites to something more: he offers bread of life, God’s Word. Pray about this struggle to accept our wilderness and wait for the surprise God wants to provide for us.