

***GOD GATHERS HIS PEOPLE***

**18<sup>TH</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time**

**Year A**

**Is 55:1-3; Ps 145:8-9, 15-18; Rom 8:35, 37-39; Mt 14:13-21**

**Dcn. Tom McConnell**

**“God gathers His people”...**

**“Jesus withdrew to a deserted place...and the crowds followed Him on foot from their towns.” [Mt 14:13]**

**Today’s Gospel reading paints a vivid picture of a gathering....of the faithful and the curious. We see thousands of people....from all walks of life....from numerous cities and villages along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee....both the young and the old....all coming to a deserted place looking for Jesus. We can imagine fishermen, farmers, mothers & fathers, tailors, merchants, professionals, carpenters...leaving their homes from towns like Bethsaida, Julias, Hippos, Gamala, Gergesa...all seeking the one called--Jesus.**

**Why did they come? What compelled them to this place at this time? For what did they hunger?**

**Some were looking for hope and promise....some yearned for words of life from the Messiah....others needed mending or healing....some were just hungry for bread and fish!....but all were satisfied by Jesus.**

**We can imagine a similar scene in today's Old Testament setting. Thousands of the Hebrew captives in Babylon gathered around Isaiah---the Prophet---to hear his promise of a covenantal banquet of life-giving food and drink. Even today's Psalmist reminds us that "The hand of the Lord feeds us our food in due season". [Ps 145:15]**

**In Jesus and the Church, Isaiah's promises in today's OT reading are fulfilled. All who are thirsty come to the living waters of baptism. The hungry delight in rich fare at the Lord's Table of plenty...given bread to eat and wine to drink at the Eucharistic feast.**

**That which was prophesied by Isaiah, was foreshadowed in the multiplying of the loaves to feed the 5,000. BTW, notice Matthew's choice of words: "Those who ate were about 5,000 men, not counting women and children." Apparently Matthew knew that it was the men who would devour most, if not all, the food! Things haven't changed much, have they? Well, back to today's Gospel...Jesus is portrayed as a David-like shepherd who leads His flock to lie down**

**on green pastures as He spreads the table of the Messiah’s banquet before them. [Ps 23] Jesus is shown as the new Moses, who likewise feeds vast crowds in a deserted place. Finally, Jesus is shown doing what the prophet, Elisha, did in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Kings—satisfying the hunger of the crowd with a few loaves and having some left over. [2 Kgs 4:42-44]**

**Note the Eucharistic language in Matthew’s Gospel: Jesus “took”....He “blessed”....He “broke” ....and He “gave” the loaves. Sound familiar? All the readings today point to the Eucharistic gathering of the faithful....who hunger and thirst for Jesus, the living bread and the living water. And the leftovers are enough to fill precisely 12 baskets—1 for each of the apostles...the pillars of Holy Mother Church. [See Gal 2:9; Rev 21:14]**

**God continues to gather His people today....like the eagle of Deuteronomy “who incites its nestlings forth by hovering over its brood”. [Dt 32:11]**

**And in the third Gospel, the Lucan Jesus says to the Church:**

*“Jerusalem, Oh Jerusalem...how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings....”* [Lk 13:34]

We see another image of God uniting His church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century hymn by “Looie Bourshwah” (Louis Bourgeois). Borrowing words from the *Didache*, the first Catechism of the Church, his hymn beautifully echoes:

*“As grain, once scattered on the hill sides,  
Was in this broken bread made one,  
So from all the lands thy Church be gathered  
Into thy Kingdom by thy Son.”*

Jesus beckons us all to come....from all walks of life.... from all our towns....with all our warts, our failures, our troubles, our frailties....to quench our hunger and our thirst at the table of plenty....where He gives Himself to us in sacrificial love. His extension of love to us---Saint Paul tells us today in the second reading from Romans---cannot be blocked or extinguished by anything.

**Shall we all, then, willingly come to the gathering ....welcoming  
the embrace of our risen Savior....placing into the cup and onto the  
paten....our sacrificial gifts of despair and brokenness....and shall  
we allow Jesus to exchange those for hope and mending?**

**Come...and dine, says the Master.....Come...and taste of the Lord  
and see that He is good.... And we say: Amen and Amen!**

**God bless you all!**