Dear Friends,

This Sunday we begin a five week focus on the 6th chapter of the Gospel of John, the chapter on the Bread of Life. At the outset we must remember that in the Gospel of John, we do not have an account of the Last Supper institution of the Eucharist. Instead, he elaborates the washing of the feet in the context of a meal. But Chapter 6 contains a treatise on the Eucharist which clarifies to us beyond doubt the mind of Christ.

In Christian tradition, John’s gospel has always been referred to as the fourth gospel, meaning it was composed after the other three, Mathew, Mark and Luke. Polycarp, a second-century Christian martyr who knew John personally, told Irenaeus that John had written the book during the apostle’s time serving the church in Ephesus. These factors suggest that John wrote the book between AD 85 and AD 95.

While the other three gospels portray Jesus as the King, the Servant, and the Son of Man, John portrays Jesus as the Son of God. John stated his theme more clearly than any of the other gospel writers. He wrote so that his readers might “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” so that they may have life in His name (John 20:31). To accomplish that goal, John presented a riveting and distinctive picture of Jesus Christ, one in complete unity with the portraits in the other three gospels, but one that also adds significantly to the Bible’s revelation of Jesus Christ, the God and Man

John 6 begins with the multiplications of the loaves and fish, our Gospel for this Sunday. Why is this miracle retold so often in the Gospels? There are two accounts of the multiplication in Matthew and Mark, one in Luke and one in John. In each passage phrases are used that are repeated at the Last Supper. “He took, He blessed, He broke.” Each passage refers to God’s continual gift of the one food we need, the Eucharist. The actions, discussions and even debates presented in John 6 reveal the depths of the Lord’s Gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist and on the Cross, two aspects of the same salvific event.

To understand John’s way of writing one must look at it as if you are in a high place or in our modern way of filming from a drone. The event is seen in many dimensions of: the actual fact, Old Testament, Divine Revelation, human reaction and deeper spiritual insight. Let us look at three elements that John emphasizes in his account of the multiplication: the time of the multiplication, references to Psalm 23, and the gathering of the fragments that are left over.

The time of the multiplication. The Gospel of John places the multiplication of the loaves and fish at the time of the Passover. The Passover was the sacred meal of the Jews celebrating their freedom from slavery in Egypt and thanking God for His continual protection. Jesus gave this meal to 5000 people during the Passover festival time and again to his close friends he gave the ‘last supper.’ The Last Supper was really the First Supper of the new People of God. The food would no longer be the Passover lamb, but the Lamb of God. The people who eat will be given freedom: deliverance from powers of evil. So, from the very start of today’s Gospel, we know that John is speaking about more than loaves and fish. He is speaking about the meal of the Christian Community, the Eucharist.

Secondly, Psalm 23 - the meal that refreshes. In today’s Gospel Jesus sees the needs of the people. He has them recline on the green grass, green pastures if you will. He restores their strength with his food and his words. This is not just about loaves and fish. Jesus is performing a prophetic action. He provides the banquet Psalm 23 spoke of: the Banquet of the Lord.

Thirdly, the recovery of the fragments that are left over. From the prophetic writings the people of Israel developed the longing for the fulfillment of the promise that God will provide a meal for all the 12 tribes. The leftover is gathered into 12 wicker baskets (Mediterranean wicker basket was large enough to carry a full-grown person – they were big!). The ideas of abundance and preservation are highlighted. What we have here is the biblical basis for the preservation of the Eucharist in our tabernacles. The Eucharist is stored so those who cannot attend the feast might still receive the Lord’s Body.

Today we pray for a deeper appreciation, a deeper reverence for the great gift of Love that is the Eucharist. To come to the Eucharist is a privilege that we have.

Be blessed, Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.

July 25, 2021
WORSHIP & MEDITATION

FIRST READING
“For thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and there shall be some left over.’”
(2 Kgs 4:43)

PSALM
The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.
(Ps 145)

SECOND READING
One body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all.
(Eph 4:4-6)

GOSPEL
Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted.
(Jn 6:11)

GOSPEL MEDITATION
Encourage Deeper Understanding of Scripture

St. Oscar Romero said, “We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is the beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.”

There were a group of ladies many years ago who made quilts. They were beautiful creations reflecting inspirational designs artfully composed from the simple scraps of fabric each woman would bring to their individual pieces. There was no plan for the finished project as each finished work became the combined creation of what each woman contributed. They abounded in vibrant colors and dazzled the beholder with intricate patterns and their myriad textures. They were so beautiful that they became coveted family treasures passed from generation to generation. Those women never realized the power of their work. Countless babies rested in the comfort of those quilts warmly nestled in the legacy of tradition they were fortunate to inherit. They adorned countless homes with their beauty and brought joy and solace to many faces.

We cannot do everything. We are not meant to. Our work in life is to contribute our individual piece, a piece that reflects the unique thumbprint I claim as my own. We only have to do small things well. Then, as St. Oscar Romero reminds us, the Lord’s grace will enter and do the rest. We have to trust that this is true just as those women trusted in the eventual beauty of their final work.

Eucharistic blessings are blessings that start small and multiply. We all come to life with only a few loaves of bread and a few fish. Not any single one of us has all that it takes to transform our world. Who knows what God will do with the little we have and how many will benefit from our kindness, compassion, wisdom, courage, conviction, love, warmth, zeal, faith, and hope? That young lad never dreamed that his few leftovers would do all that they did. God shows up in unexpected ways! Where would life’s adventure and fun be if it were any other way? Being able to be part of bringing God’s creative, transforming, healing to the world opens us up to wonder, awe, and excitement! We can all bring our little piece to the bigger work of God that can result in being a coveted jewel passed generation to generation. This is good news indeed!

Bread and wine transform into Christ’s Body and Blood and we become what we eat. Trust that.
The first reading, 2 Kgs 4:42 - 44

The first reading, taken from the Second Book of Kings, prepares us for today’s Gospel which describes the miraculous feeding of more than five thousand people by Jesus, using a boy’s gift of five barley loaves and two dried fish. The providential nourishment of God’s people is seen several times in the Old Testament. It begins with the manna and quail of the exodus (Ex 16). In the Elijah-Elisha cycle of miracle stories, connected with the prophets’ career, the miraculous feeding of a hungry widow and her son by Elijah is done with prodigality (1 Kgs 17:7 - 16). Since events in the life of the two prophets are frequently paralleled, it is not surprising to find a feeding in the Elisha cycle as well. This story has also had an influence on the loaves and fish account in Jesus’ ministry, as the pairing in today’s liturgy suggests.

The offering of first fruits of the soil to the Lord at the sanctuary was customary; here the same is offered to the prophet as well, suggesting the esteem in which Elisha was held (v42). The donor comes from Baal-shalishah, a town southwest of Samaria. The calm directive of the prophet to the incredulous questioner throws into strong relief the subsequent miraculous action, an exchange closely paralleled in the New Testament account of the loaves (v42; Mk 6:37ff). As is typical of the feeding miracles, there is not only enough to eat but food left over (v44).

The paired readings challenge the Church to continue Elisha’s and Jesus’ tradition by becoming, with His power, a provider and multiplier of bread for the poor.

The second reading, Ephesians 4:1-6

St. Paul, in prison, reminds the Ephesians that Jesus united the Jews and the Gentiles, bringing them together as Christians in one Faith and one Baptism. Hence, he advises them to keep this unity intact as one body and one spirit by living as true Christians “bearing with one another in love,” with humility, gentleness, patience and peace. At present, we are the community that Paul describes. We are the ones called to feed the hungry today. As members of the body of Christ, we need to remember that miracles can happen through our prayers, our donations, and our hands when we help Him to distribute to the hungry the food destined for all by our generous God. In this Eucharist, we are made one Body with the Lord, as we hear in today’s Epistle.

GOSPEL INSIGHTS

- “Sheep without shepherd:”

But when they came ashore there was a large crowd waiting for them. Jesus’ heart was moved with pity for those people who were “sheep without a shepherd.” Here the reference to the shepherd was probably to religious leaders, because at this time the Jews were an occupied people, and the real political power was in the hands of the pagan Romans. This brief description, “sheep without a shepherd,” is also dense with Biblical allusions. Like the people of Israel, the crowds were in the desert where they would receive not only miraculous food (next Sunday’s Gospel), but guidance and instruction, just as the Torah had been given in the desert of Sinai. “Sheep without a shepherd” will perish because a) they cannot find their way and will probably end up being eaten by a wolf or other carnivores b) they cannot find pasture, water, and food for themselves, and c) they have no defense against the dangers which threaten them. Jesus’ first act with these shepherd-less sheep was to teach them [v. 34], then to feed them [vv. 35-40], and finally to protect the apostles (who were also His sheep), from the storm [vv. 45-52]. This text affirms Jesus’ extraordinary availability and his compassion for the needy. It teaches us that a Christian should be ready to sacrifice his time and even his rest in the service of the Gospel.

To equip ourselves we need to turn to God. Prayer is essentially listening to God and talking to Him. One of our main problems is that we do not truly allow God the opportunity to speak to us. We also do not know how to “be still and listen.” Hence, we are often in danger of refusing to allow God to recharge us with spiritual energy and strength. In addition, we do not set aside enough time for God to speak to us and for us to speak to Him. Ministry without prayer is like shooting arrows without a target. But we can make better choices.
Feast of plenty and Eucharist

No Bible scholar doubts that all six bread miracles in the Gospels are about the Eucharist. The multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle from Jesus’ public ministry narrated in all four Gospels with Eucharistic overtones. The early Christian community saw this event as anticipating the Eucharist. John uses this story in his Gospel to introduce Jesus’ profound and extended reflection on the Eucharist and the Bread of Life. The Cycle B lectionary has selected portions from John chapter 6 for five Sundays to remind us of Jesus’ teaching on the Eucharist. The Eucharistic coloring of the multiplication of bread is clear in Jesus’ blessing, breaking, and giving the loaves. Thus, the miracle itself becomes a symbol of the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity. The sharing of the broken bread is a sign of a community that is expected to share and provide in abundance for the needs of its members. Our word Eucharist is taken from the Greek language and describes an action: “to give thanks.” In the Eucharist we are fed by Jesus Himself, and we are sent to serve others. Matthew invites us to see this miracle as a type or symbol explaining the Sacrament’s meaning.

The story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes recalls a particular aspect of the Mass. In this miracle, Jesus multiplies a young boy’s offering of five barley loaves and two fish. In the Offertory at Mass, we present the fruits of our labors, represented by bread and wine. These gifts, given to us first by God as grain and fruit, are returned to God in our offering of thanksgiving. God in turn transforms our gifts, making this bread and wine the very Body and Blood of Jesus. We also offer ourselves in this exchange, and we, too, are transformed by the Eucharist.

This daily breaking of the bread also has eschatological associations: it is an anticipation of the Messianic Wedding Banquet. John’s description of this event anticipates the Messianic Wedding Banquet of Heaven, as the crowd sits down in rows to enjoy a great free meal. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are anticipating this same Eternal Wedding Banquet of Heaven. The Church’s Eucharist today combines both the sacrificial and the eschatological associations. In the recent past, emphasis has been placed more on the sacrificial than on the eschatological aspect, but the imbalance is now being readdressed.

QUIZ TIME

1. How many barley loaves did Elisha use to feed 100 people?
   a. One hundred
   b. Fifty
   c. Seventy
   d. Twenty

2. What does Paul want the people to remain in the second reading?
   a. In prison
   b. United as one
   c. In hiding
   d. Angry

3. How many men did Jesus feed?
   a. About 500
   b. About 5,000
   c. About 2,000
   d. About 50

4. With what did Jesus feed the people?
   a. Five loaves of bread and two fish
   b. Breakfast burritos
   c. Sandwiches and milk
   d. Coffee and beans

5. How many baskets of leftover food was gathered?
   a. Five
   b. Ten
   c. Twelve
   d. Seven

1. Is there any common theme in all three readings?
2. Find the difference between the multiplication accounts between Mathew and Luke? (Mt. 14: 13-21, Lk. 9:10-17)
3. Share with your group what parts of the Mass reflect the meal and sacrifice.