

June 19, 2022

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Luke 9:11b-17

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. As day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, “Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.” He said to them, “Give them some food yourselves.” They replied, “Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people.” Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Jesus said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty.” They did so and made them all sit down. Then, *taking 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. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

Background:

Luke describes this event as taking place in Bethsaida, a familiar place to Jesus and the disciples. It is a fishing village on the northeastern shore of Galilee and was the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter. Jesus had cured a blind man here (Mark 8:22-26). Jesus is reported to have complained that the people of Bethsaida, as well as those of Chorazin, were slow to repent (Matthew 11:21), considering the signs of power that he had shown in their area. These people would have been familiar with Jesus and his ministry. This may explain the great crowds that gathered to hear Jesus speak about the Kingdom of God. If familiarity with Jesus did not draw the crowd, reports that he was “healing those who needed to be cured” would have done so. As the day nears its end and the time for the main meal of the day approaches, the twelve (with just five loaves and two fish) suggest that Jesus send the crowd away so that they can get provisions and secure lodging.

This gospel text has many levels of significance for Luke’s community. They would be familiar with the stories from the Hebrew Scripture where God had acted to feed their ancestors. Most important would be the feeding with quail and manna during their time in the desert (Exodus 16:4-35). A story less familiar to the contemporary Christian is that of Elisha, a prophet, who was able to feed 100 people with 20 barley loaves.

“A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing the man of God twenty barley loaves made from the first-fruits, and fresh grain in the ear. Elisha said, ‘Give it to the people to eat.’ But his servant objected, ‘How can I set this before a hundred men?’ ‘Give it to the people to eat,’ Elisha insisted. ‘For thus says the Lord, they shall eat and there shall be some left over.’ And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the Lord had said.” (2Kings 4:42-44)

With this background, Luke’s community would understand that Jesus was doing for them what God had done for their ancestors.

On yet another level, Luke has chosen to tell this story using language that would remind the community of their Eucharistic banquet. The sequence of the verbs in this text: “taking the loaves,” “said the blessing,” “broke them,” and “gave them to the disciples” (Luke 9:16) is identical to the text used by Luke at the Last Supper. “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘this is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’” (Luke 22:19) This language would remind the people of the Last Supper, the Eucharistic banquet, and the final banquet when the Kingdom of God is restored. This last notion is enhanced by the fact that Luke reports that “all were satisfied.” In fact, the context for this story is that Jesus was speaking about the Kingdom of God and healing those who were in need. (Luke 9:12)

Reflection Questions:

1. What are your memories of favorite meals growing up?
2. Have there been some banquets that have been memorable? What made them memorable?
3. Do you have memories of being truly hungry? Have you ever been in the midst of people who typically do not have enough to eat? How does your experience of hunger affect how you hear this gospel?
4. Can you recall passages in the scriptures that make reference to a heavenly banquet in some way?

5. If you think of a gathering of five thousand in the countryside, hoping to be healed and to hear a religious teacher, what kind of people would you expect to find among the group? How would that be similar to or different from those you will gather with on Sunday to hear this gospel?
6. Given Jesus' complaint about the people of Bethsaida in Matthew 11:22, do you find it surprising that Jesus would perform such a sign of compassion for them?
7. How often do you think those gathering there ever sat down to a meal where they could eat as much as they wanted and have leftovers besides?
8. How do you think the disciples heard Jesus' statement that they give the people some food themselves? Do you think that statement is important to the story? Is it important for you as you hear the story today?
9. The apostles provide the bread and the fish, distribute it to those gathered, and collect the remainder. Does the fact that Jesus wants them involved in the feeding of the crowd have meaning for you?
10. Jesus was healing the sick and teaching about the Kingdom of God when he told the disciples, "Give them some food yourselves." How does this fact impact you?
11. The last verse of the text says that the crowd ate until they were satisfied. Does God also desire for you to have enough so that you are satisfied? Do you think that God desires for those you will gather with to hear this text to be satisfied? What about all those who will not hear this text this Sunday for whatever reason?
12. Can you talk with God about this feast and how this gospel might be shedding some light on this feast for you?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for June 19, 2022, The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

In those days, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words:
"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand."
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool."

The scepter of your power the Lord stretch forth from Zion: "Rule in the midst of your enemies."

"Yours is princely power, in holy splendor; before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you."

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,

that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves." They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people." Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty." They did so and made them all sit down. Then taking 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. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

Excerpts from Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:1-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; and Luke 9:11-17

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for June 19th, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Luke tells the story of Jesus feeding five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. "Looking up to heaven, Jesus said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." When all had eaten and were satisfied, the leftover fragments filled twelve wicker baskets.

The other readings also have references to uniquely relevant occasions where bread is blessed and distributed by one from a powerful and priestly lineage. In the first reading from Genesis, Melchizedek, a priest and king, brings out bread and wine, and offers a blessing upon Abram and God: "Blessed be Abram, by God the creator, and blessed be God who delivered your foes into your hand." Psalm 110 proclaims, "You are a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek. Yours is princely power; I have begotten you. Rule in the midst of your enemies; I will make them your footstool." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Corinthians about Jesus feeding his followers at the last supper: "On the night he was handed over, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, 'This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, the cup. 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.' When you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!