

July 29, 2018
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 6:1-15

After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (of Tiberias). A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little (bit)." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. 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. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Background:

The Lectionary focuses on the Gospel of Mark during this lectionary cycle. The gospel texts for the past six Sundays have walked through the 4th, 5th, and 6th chapters of Mark, highlighting Jesus' ministry and teaching in Galilee. Last Sunday's gospel recorded the return of the twelve from their efforts to preach repentance and drive out evil. The crowd that is attracted by their return is so great that Jesus invites the twelve to come away to a deserted place. But the crowd pursues them and arrives even before they disembark from their boats. In Mark's gospel, this leads to his narrative of the feeding of the crowd. (Mark 6:34-44)

The Lectionary, instead of using Mark's description of the feeding of the multitude, turns to John's gospel, starting with the feeding of the crowd story from John's 6th chapter this week. It continues with gospels from John for the next five Sundays, with John's version of Jesus' teaching as it gradually unfolds the mystery of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

In the opening verse of this week's gospel text, John states that the signs that Jesus has performed have had a huge impact on the people. Crowds are now seeking after him. There is no indication that they have come to believe in Jesus, so the impression is that they are coming in hopes that they might witness some sign, or perhaps be the beneficiary of one. There is also no mention that the people are hungry, or that Jesus has been teaching them at some length. Therefore, the desire to feed the people is rooted in something other than the crowd's request or desire to be fed. The focus is on the incident as a sign of God's power in the person of Jesus.

The feast of Passover also coincides with the feast of Unleavened Bread. These feasts celebrate the people's release from the slavery of the Egyptians and the first harvest in the new Promised Land. Their celebration recalls the saving events of the past and looks forward in hope to the final age of complete fulfillment, the reign of God. It is also the season of the barley harvest. After wheat, barley was the most plentiful grain. It was more tolerant to variations in weather and it grew to maturity quicker than wheat. Barley loaves were considered the bread of the poor. The fish mentioned in the text would have been small fish, no larger than sardines, and were probably dried.

In Mark's account, the disciples play a much more active role. The disciples approach Jesus about the people's need for food, Jesus tells them that they should provide for the need, and they help distribute the food. But in John's account here, Jesus initiates the incident by asking Philip where they could buy food. Jesus knows what he is going to do, and there is no mention that the disciples help distribute the food. In both texts, there is a similarity to the Eucharist in that Jesus takes the food, gives thanks, and distributes the food. In John's gospel, the connection is made stronger by focusing primarily on the bread. In both texts, the miraculous nature of what has taken place is highlighted by the fact that twelve baskets of leftovers are collected. John also makes it clear that the people understand the nature of what has taken place. They see this miracle as a signal that the time of completion is near. The fulfillment of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread has finally arrived, and the people move to make Jesus their king.

Reflection Questions:

1. If I had heard the reports of what Jesus was doing and teaching, and if I had the opportunity to see him in person...
2. If Jesus would have turned to me that day and asked, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" I would have...
3. Do you ever feel like Jesus is asking you questions but already knows what He intends to do?
4. Imagine that you are that child with the barley loaves and two small fish, and you hear Andrew tell Jesus about your loaves and fish. What thoughts would be going through you?
5. Can you also imagine that you are one of the disciples who has just been instructed to give the people as much as they wanted? What would you be thinking as you turned to begin to distribute the food to the crowd?
6. Imagine you are helping to gather up the leftovers. What would be some of the things going through you as pick up all the bits and pieces of food left behind?
7. Which part of this text seems to touch you? Can you take some time to talk to God about whatever it is that has touched you in this gospel?

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. The homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. The third 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 July 29, 2018, the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, 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 people?" Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat. 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.

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.
Let all your works give you thanks, O Lord, and let your faithful ones bless you.
Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.
The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season;
you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.
The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works.
The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

Brothers and sisters: I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:
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, who is over all and through all and in all.

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. 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. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Excerpts from 2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145:10-11, 15-18; Ephesians 4:1-6; and John 6:1-15