

July 28, 2024
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 6:1-15

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.

Background:

Most of the Gospels for this liturgical year are taken from Mark's Gospel. For the last six Sundays they have reflected on texts from the 4th, 5th, and 6th chapters of Mark that highlight Jesus' ministry and teaching in Galilee. Last Sunday's Gospel recorded the return of the twelve from their first efforts at preaching. But the crowd that was attracted by their return does not make it possible for them to even eat. So Jesus invites them to come away to a deserted place. But the crowd pursues them on foot. 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 the 6th chapter of John's Gospel, and we will hear Jesus' teaching as described in John for the next five Sundays. Those Gospels will unfold the mystery of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

In the opening verse of the Gospel, 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 out of faith in Jesus. Therefore, the impression is given that they are coming in hope that they might witness some miracle. Nor is there any mention that the people are hungry or that Jesus has been teaching them at some length. This leaves the impression that Jesus' desire to feed the people is rooted in something other than the crowd's request or need for food. What stands out then is the sign of God's power in the person of Jesus that in the text leads the people to want to make Jesus their king.

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 of 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 of this event, 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, 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 what has taken place 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. Have you ever wished that you could have lived at the time of Jesus to hear him preach, witness one of his healings, etc.? To what extent do you think you would have gone to experience the person of the living Jesus?
2. When you think of the crowd in today's Gospel, to what extent might they have gone to follow Jesus?
3. If you were one of the apostles that day and heard Jesus ask Philip where they might buy bread to feed the crowd that was gathering, what are some of the things you would have thought to yourself?
4. Imagine that you are the one with the barley loaves and two small fish. What would you be thinking as Andrew tells Jesus about your lunch?
5. Can you 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?
6. Imagine you are helping to gather up the leftovers. What would be some of the things going through you as you pick up all the fragments of the leftover food?
7. Have you ever felt that the needs of others are too great or that your resources are too small? How do those kinds of thoughts affect you? Can you talk with God about those feelings?

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 fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.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.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for July 28, 2024, 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

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for July 28th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from John, Jesus sees the large crowd and says to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them?" Andrew responds, "There is a boy with five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus gives thanks and distributes them to the five thousand, and when they have had their fill, the disciples fill twelve baskets with the fragments.

The other readings also have references to barley loaves, and the people being fed--fed in miraculous numbers, the effect of the hand of God, who is over all and who unites us all. In the first reading from 2 Kings, Elisha,

given twenty barley loaves, says, "Give it to the people." His servant objects, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" But when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the Lord had said. Psalm 145 acclaims, "You give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy every living thing. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs." In the second reading, from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul urges, "Live in a manner worthy of the call you received, bearing with one another, striving to preserve unity: one body, as you were called to the one hope, one God, in all."

Although the Gospel this week is from John, it comes in sequence in the place where Mark's version of the same story occurs. In our recent Sunday Gospels from Mark, Jesus has been working increasingly greater miracles, and the scope expanded to where the apostles were also working miracles, driving out demons and curing the sick. Last week, Jesus recognized the eager crowd following him as sheep without a shepherd; he had pity on them and began to teach them more things. Then in today's Gospel, Jesus is aware that this same crowd is not only spiritually hungry, but ready for food physically as well. John's is the version that most directly corresponds to the story of Elisha's feeding the people with barley loaves (our first reading). The reaction: "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world!"

Joe

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