

## SPIRITUALITY

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has risen in our midst.

God has visited his people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

## Gospel

John 6:1-15; L110B

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.

*Continued in Appendix A, p. 300.*

## Reflecting on the Gospel

Beginning today, the church gives us five weeks of Sunday gospel readings from John. It's as though we are taking a break from Mark to hear from another evangelist. Throughout these five weeks we will be reading from John chapter 6, wherein we have the multiplication of the loaves followed by Jesus' walking on water, and the bread of life discourse. The theology and symbolism in John 6 is profound and has inspired centuries of contemplation and rich exegesis. We

remember that the story of the multiplication of loaves is told in each of the four gospels, the only "miracle story" shared by each.

Last week we heard Mark's setup to the feeding of the five thousand, but this week we hear John's version rather than Mark's. The two stories have many similarities: two hundred denarii, five loaves and two fish, the crowd numbering five thousand men, and twelve baskets of leftovers, to name a few. But there are some differences to the stories as well.

John's theology is ultimately Christology. John has an intense focus on Jesus. In Mark's version of the multiplication of the loaves, the disciples come to Jesus with their concern about moving the people along before they have to feed them. In John, Jesus takes the initiative in asking Philip about feeding the people. And there is something equivalent to an editorial note saying that

Jesus asked this question only to test him. Again, John's gospel shows Jesus clearly in charge, clearly taking the lead, clearly in the driver's seat. Even when he

asks a question it is merely to test someone.

The eucharistic overtones so prominent in Mark are also present in John but in a different way. Rather than for four key verbs used by Mark, John uses a Greek term for the "fragments" (*klasmata*) that were collected and gathered into the baskets. This Greek term is used by the *Didache* (an early church book written in the first century, parts of which are akin to a catechism) to speak of Eucharist.

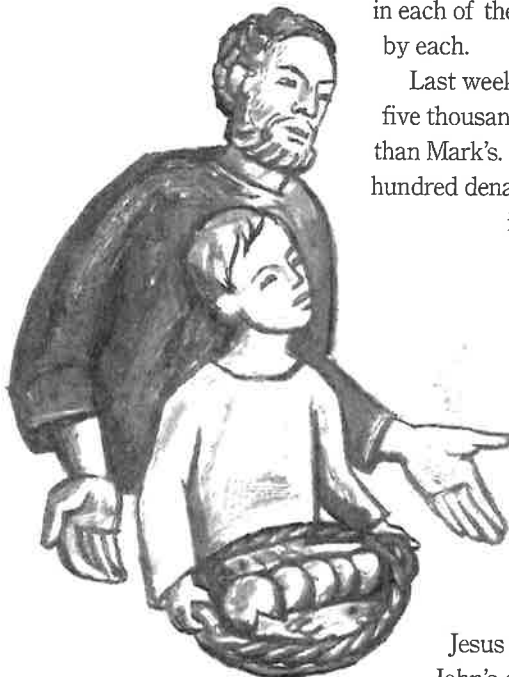
Finally, upon witnessing this sign (the multiplication of the loaves) the crowd explicitly recognizes Jesus as a prophet. No doubt the story of the prophet Elisha and the multiplication of the loaves from 2 Kings 4:42-44 was in mind. Jesus realized the crowd wanted to make him a king, so he makes a speedy solo exit.

The multiplication of the loaves, with its eucharistic overtones, its prominence on Jesus and his fulfilling human needs, and the growing recognition by the crowds that he must be a prophet demonstrate how pivotal this episode was and continues to be.

## Living the Paschal Mystery

Jesus satisfies human needs. The story tells us that the crowds followed Jesus because they saw the signs he did on those who were diseased. After witnessing another sign they will recognize him as a prophet. The recognition on the part of the crowds is based on Jesus satisfying human needs.

We can be reminded of family life and dealing with children. Often as long as all needs (and wants) are met things can seem to be going along well. The chil-



dren are satisfied. We will see later in this same chapter of John that Jesus asks something of the crowds and most abandon him. It's easy to follow Jesus when we are on the receiving end of his bounty and goodness. It's easy for children to be happy when they are on the receiving end of parents' bounty and goodness. But what happens when the crowds are asked to make a commitment? What happens when family members are asked to step up and take some responsibility?

Growing into adult discipleship means that there will come a time (if it hasn't come already) when we will no longer be simply on the receiving end of the relationship. We will be called to enter further into a relationship with Jesus that is more mutually reciprocal, though Jesus will always be the teacher and we will always be in the position of disciples. Jesus will call the crowds closer to the circle with him. It's easy to be a follower, or a member of the crowd receiving goodies. Soon, those crowds will be invited to go deeper.

**Focusing the Gospel**

*John 6:1-15*

Today the Lectionary interrupts the semi-continuous readings from Mark's gospel. Over the next five Sundays, the gospel readings will be taken from chapter 6 from the Gospel of John, the bread of life discourse of Jesus. Several scholars have suggested that chapter 6 of John's gospel may have originally been the text of a homily or treatise by an early Christian teacher on the developing sacrament of the Eucharist.

Jesus' feeding of the multitude with scraps of bread and fish is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. This story was cherished by the first Christians for whom the Eucharist was becoming the center of their life together. Jesus' actions are indeed "eucharistic": bread (and fish) is collected, Jesus gives thanks (the word used in the Greek text of Mark's gospel is *eucharisteo*) and breaks the bread, and the community feasts.

The gospel readings over the next few Sundays will invite us to consider the deeper meanings of Eucharist: Christ, the Bread of Life, present to us in this sacrament that is given to us in order that we might become sacramen

**Focusing the First Reading**

*2 Kgs 4:42-44*

The first reading recounts the prophet Elisha's feeding of a hundred (a number symbolic of totality) with only twenty barley loaves (a left over). The faithful Elisha is convinced that God will provide in the midst of famine and depravation.

**Focusing the Responsorial Psalm**

*Ps 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18 (see 16)*

In the last verses of Psalm 145, every element of creation gives praise to the Maker, whose very holiness is contained in every living thing.

**Focusing the Second Reading**

*Eph 4:1-6*

Jesus' transforming the hungry crowd into a eucharistic community in the gospel mirrors Paul's exhortation to the church at Ephesus to be worthy of the call you have received, to be one in God's spirit and peace.

**PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS**

We are part of many communities in our lives: families, parishes, classes, sports teams, businesses, etc. What have been some of your most joyful and enriching experiences of community and what made them so?

What "small gifts" have you received that have made a big difference in your life?

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 29, 2018**

**Gospel (cont.)**

*John 6:1-15; L110B*

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.