



17th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Date: Sunday, July 26, 2015 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B

First Reading: 2 Kings 4:42–44

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:10–11, 15–18 | **Response:** Psalm 145:16

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:1–6

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 7:16

Gospel Reading: John 6:1–15

Preached at: the Newman Centre's St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Community in the Archdiocese of Toronto, Canada.

Clearly this story of the multiplication of the loaves that we have just heard is an allusion to the Eucharist that we are celebrating together here today.

In fact, all of today's readings have much to say about the Mass that we celebrate when we come to Newman.

The second reading is an eloquent plea for peace in the community and there is a mini-Creed within it declaring one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all.

I'd like to share just three points about today's Gospel. I'm sure we are all aware, and have heard before how this Gospel prefigures Christ's actions at the Last Supper and the Eucharist which the Church celebrates in memory of that. In fact for the next five weeks the Church will read from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel and meditate on the theme of the 'Bread of Life'. This theme is not unique to John. There are two accounts in Mark and Matthew's gospels, and a further one in Luke. We know how interested the early Church was in the Eucharist, and the fact that this story is told in all the Gospels, with only slight differences, only attests to the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the Church.

And I am sure that we all noticed how the first reading sounded quite like a prefiguring of our Gospel. Both Elisha and Jesus are concerned that the people may eat; both of their companions seem to disbelieve that there is enough; and both times they insist and we are told there is "some left over". The similarities are very clear, and I'm sure you don't need me to point them out.

Instead, I'd like to share with you some of my reflections on the Gospel, which is itself a central part of Jesus' larger and more important teaching on the Bread of Life.

Three things stand out for me about today's Gospel.

1. The first is about the person of Jesus. We see how attractive he is, how crowds gather around him and how attentive he is to those that come to him. If we try to imagine the situation Jesus finds himself in, we can feel for the crowds that have gathered around Jesus. They have been following him so that they can see his miracles and be healed by him. In fact, they have been so focused on Jesus, that he realizes they have forgotten to eat. But Jesus is attentive in this Gospel. In fact we even see his attentiveness in who he addresses. He is not speaking with Peter – the leader of the Apostles who was probably used to being spoken to, but he engages Philip and Peter's brother, Andrew. Jesus is also attentive in how he deals with the crowd. He urges them to sit so that he can teach them. But Jesus, in this Gospel, does not address the crowd, rather it is his actions, and not his words, that contain the lesson.
2. This leads us to the second point, which concerns not Jesus, but his apostles. Jesus asks them where they could buy bread for the people to eat, and Philip is very practical when he explains that even two hundred dinari would not be able to buy enough. Andrew, following Jesus, was also attentive. He had noticed that a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish was prepared to share what he had, but Andrew had given up, saying realistically to Jesus 'what is that between so many?' Jesus instead performs the Eucharistic actions we are so familiar with at Mass, where he takes the loaves, gives thanks, and breaks them up to be distributed among all those gathered. He then instructs the apostles to collect the pieces left over and ensure that nothing is wasted. There are two things that I notice here: the first is the generosity of the small boy. It is not specifically mentioned, but I think it is implied in Andrew's question. The second is related to the first, that Andrew directs his question to Jesus, perhaps without even imagining that there could ever be an answer. But Jesus is able to transform that perplexing question into a miracle – a miracle that is characterized by sharing what one has with one another. Jesus of course, the author of John's Gospel will go on to show, desires to share his whole being and so become the

Bread of Life for us; and we, as a Church, eventually share in and become Christ's body – which St Paul in our second reading so wonderfully describes. We heard in the Psalm that: “The eyes of all creatures look to you and you give them their food in due time.” This reminds me of those wonderful words in the Our Father when we say “give us this day our daily bread.” The bread that Jesus gives is not only for our bodies, but for our spirits too. When we receive the Eucharist we are not meant to keep it to ourselves, but to live out the effects in the community. This is what St Paul talks about when he says: “Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.” This is the peace that Jesus wants to share with us, a joy that is made complete when we imitate our Master and give of ourselves to those around us. When, as Pope Francis would encourage, we become aware and attentive to the weakest and poorest in our communities and serve them. When we, like the apostles, remain practical and realistic in our actions, but optimistic that through whatever small actions we might take, God will find a way to make them sufficient, just as he was able to satisfy the hungry crowd on the mountainside.

3. The third and final point that I'd like to share with you this morning concerns the attitude of Jesus. After Jesus multiplied the loaves, an act that surely would have reminded the crowd of the miracle of manna in the Old Testament and how there was similarly left over gifts from heaven, the crowd would have seen this act as a confirmation of Jesus as their long awaited Messiah. Jesus did not, however, wish to become a political messiah who would rule by force like the other rulers of the day, but instead he preferred to call himself the Son of Man, who came to serve, to be, like we heard last week, a shepherd. Jesus knew that the political kingdom the Jews desired was not the sort that his Father desires, and he escapes to the mountains to pray. My third point is that even in the midst of Jesus doing so much work for the crowd and being attentive to their needs, he finds time to retreat into silence and solitude and to pray to the Father. We have to remember that God's Kingdom is not brought about by natural means alone, but by the grace that comes from the supernatural work of spending time in prayer with God. It is there that we will be truly nourished. This nourishment of course is not for its own sake, but for the sake of others, but it can only be truly received, and appreciated, in prayer. Which is why the Mass is one of the greatest prayers of all.

So the three points that I would invite us to reflect on today are

1. How can we be attentive, like Jesus was, to those around us. How can we focus on their needs, their concerns, their hopes and desires, and so move out of ourselves and in so doing enlarge our hearts to welcome those around us.
2. The second is that as we imitate Jesus in being attentive, let us not forget to speak with him, and to share with him our doubts and concerns – no matter how trivial or impossible they might seem to us. And as we speak with him let us listen to Him and we will discover his attitudes, and his way of being, and notice how it is different to our own, where for example one might have chosen to sell the loaves and fishes to the people, we see in Jesus the example to give freely and share. Let us imitate the generosity of the small boy and allow God to amaze us with his generosity. I was particularly struck by this point myself when I recently read some of the speeches Pope Francis gave recently in South America. He said, in connection with the upcoming Synod on the Family and commenting on an earlier sign in John's Gospel: "Christ can take even what might seem to us impure, scandalous or threatening and turn it ... into a miracle". Let us pray that we are able to allow God to continue to amaze us with his miracles, and to show us how to be even more generous, like the small boy, and not to be overwhelmed with how impossible something might seem, but to allow God to reveal the possibilities to us. When we do that, we will find ourselves led back to God as we pray and give thanks for everything that he has given us, and be reminded that everything is God's gift and that we should not stand in the way of God's generosity.
3. This honest, frank conversation will lead us to prayer, which was the third point. When we pray as a Body, remaining in the Church – a Church that seeks to include everyone – we are able to preserve the unity that St Paul speaks of, but we are also made strong enough to search out all who are weak and heavy-burdened and to invite them to the table of the Lord, to share the Good News of the Gospel with everyone, and to make God's Kingdom a reality in our lives and in the lives of those we come into contact with. We can share with them our Faith, which as St Paul summarized so succinctly in our second reading: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all.

Let us pray today to be attentive so that we might see God within everyone around us; let us pray for the generosity to allow God to work through us; and let us give thanks for a God who wants to share himself with us so much, that he became Man, and suffered and died for us so that we might have the fullness of life, a life that we share together in this community at Newman.

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