

## HOMILY 17<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021

*Jn 6.1-15*

*2Kings 44.42-44*

*Eph 4.1-6*

*Well, here we are, with a bit more déjà vu all over again, and again, with an extended lockdown, hopefully to end by Wednesday next week now!! Frustrating as it is, with the cold winter week we've just had, it's no penance to stay indoors for at least most of the time. Spring flowers are already appearing, and the days are slowly getting longer!*

Meanwhile, we jump from chapter 6 in Mark's Gospel to chapter 6 in John's, as we begin Jesus' Bread of Life discourse, with the feeding of the 5,000, which has its variations in all 4 Gospels. In each, the account begins with the hungry masses gathered to hear what Jesus has to say, but then start to feel the pangs of hunger, with the time has passing by, as they listen to his words of wisdom and faith.

The first point I'd make is that Jesus is responding to human physical needs first and foremost, as there's no earthly use in focussing on spiritual matters if basic needs such as hunger and thirst, even some form of physical comfort are not met, so that the mind can then concentrate on the world of ideas and the deeper meaning of things, such as the spiritual dimension of life and its meaning.

The 5 barley loaves and two fish are just the start of the sharing, which Jesus enables through taking, giving thanks and distributing first the loaves, then the fishes. There's something implicit here about sharing whatever resources we have, and there will be more than enough for all, in this world of distorted priorities and massive divide between rich and poor. A call to social justice comes to mind, as a result of reflection on this scenario.

John is the only evangelist to directly link the physical nourishment of the people with Jesus' teaching of himself being the Bread of Life. His long Last Supper discourse has Jesus beginning with the washing of the feet, not just about dirty feet either, but as a call to service of others, leading by example, and does not include the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup, as the other Gospel accounts have it. John seems happy enough to make the links between bread and Eucharist in this chapter we begin today.

A parishioner said to me last year during the long lockdown, that she really missed receiving '*the bread*' at Mass, as she put it, no disrespect intended, as it was clearly a statement of faith about the Eucharist or Communion being an important part of her faith life, as '*the bread of life*', along with the communal aspect of being together in expressing faith through worship and receiving spiritual nourishment in Word and Sacrament, gathered in Jesus' name, and challenged to take his Gospel message to heart in our own lives.

Perhaps one fringe benefit of our recent lockdown experience is a heightened awareness of the importance of Eucharist in our faith lives, for those who participate on a regular basis, and to suddenly be deprived, of what we can take for granted through routine, makes us appreciate its significance all the more.

Even in the initial stages of the discourse here, John uses words, which, in Greek, prefigure the Bread for the Broken, as necessary spiritual nourishment for our journey of life, as imperfect but faithful disciples. He refers to *eucharistein* in Greek, as Jesus uses the formula of giving thanks, then breaking and sharing with all. Then there are the leftovers, or remnants where the Greek word *klasmata* is used, a term later connected with Eucharist in gatherings of the early church communities, where some of the sacred or consecrated bread was saved and then distributed to those who couldn't be present, much as we take Communion to those who can't physically be present at Mass due to age or illness. So, from the start, we have links between our physical and spiritual needs in John's development of an understanding of what Jesus says, does and why this pattern is to continue in Christian communities.

Frank Moloney SDB expresses this well: "*Jesus nourishes his people, but they misread the significance of the feeding. The crowd want to make Jesus, the bringer of the manna, into a Messianic King. Jesus has other plans. Do we come to the eucharistic table full of our own self-righteousness and plans, missing the significance... Do I celebrate Jesus' eucharistic presence as a chance to recognize my need to receive his self-giving love, and my responsibility to show such love to others?*"

Our mission as People of God, the Church, is to evangelize in practical ways, as well as the spiritual dimension, in responding to a world seeking meaning, but through first striving to contributing towards meeting the physical needs of those deprived of the basics of life – water, food, shelter, sanitation, health care and education for all. These necessities are directly linked with the Gospel message of social justice, linked with the spiritual dimension of faith. Just as Jesus first meets the physical needs of the hungry crowd gathered before him, we are to continue that mission on our pilgrim journey of life and faith.

*john hannon*

*25<sup>th</sup> July 2021*