

GOD FEEDS US – John 6:1-15

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Father Cole Daily

Starting this week and for the next five weeks, we will be reading the story of the Bread of Life Discourse from the Gospel of St. John at Sunday Mass. Every three years, this cycle of readings occurs, and it is intentional. Holy Mother Church wants us to reflect on the most important things in our Catholic life: the Eucharist and the Mass. In light of this, Fr. Underwood and I will be preaching a series of homilies over these five weeks about the Mass. And there is good reason to do this. We all experience de-moralization at times about our faith. Mass, for many of us, is simply a routine part of our life; we come without question; we complain when it is too long or too boring; we wonder why it doesn't fit into the rest of our life. Our goal, during these weeks as always, is to make Christ a "You" in your life, not just a "He" – someone who is present to you. And He is most present right here, right now, at Mass.

Before Jesus begins the famous sermon on the Eucharist, He performs this great miracle, the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels: the multiplication of the fish and the loaves. Let's be clear: this is a real miracle. It wasn't a miracle of "sharing", as some non-believing scholars have argued. Jesus actually took 5 loaves and 2 fish and fed THOUSANDS of people. This is unheard of. We need to be shocked a little, like the people were who witnessed this miracle. They wanted to drag Jesus off to make Him king! Imagine: a man who could feed that many people could keep the world from starving; He could even feed an army that could conquer the world. But Jesus has other plans. This is not the greatest miracle – it points to a greater miracle that is to come. John says that he "gave

thanks” – the Greek word is “*Eucharistia*”. The real miracle is not here, as we will see in the following weeks. Jesus is not only able to feed us with natural food, but with *supernatural* food – with Himself in the Eucharist.

Let’s pause for a second and look at the Apostles. Jesus turns Philip in order to test him: “How can we feed these people?” Philip and the other apostles are stuck. It would be like this: you and Jesus walk into a crowded school gym, filled with kids. He looks at you and says: “So, when are you taking all these kids to Disney World?” This seems absurd! And that is just where the apostles are stuck. They are human beings; weak, not very bright, and not very rich. They see the limitations of their humanity in this instance. They start calculating, measuring; they conclude that there is no possible way for a human being to accomplish this task – and it should not be an expectation. Their humanity becomes a brick wall between them and God’s power.

Every time we come to Mass, we are likewise put to the test. Jesus turns to each of us and invites us: “Will you allow me to feed you?” And then the test begins. The limitations of our humanity rear their ugly heads. We are distracted. There is a kid screaming next to me. Why does this song last for ten minutes? Father’s homily is too boring. Father’s homily isn’t funny enough. Father’s vestments are too flashy. Father’s vestments aren’t flashy enough. Why can’t Mass be thirty minutes long like at other places? Why is my kid chewing on the pew? I wonder what it tastes like? The humanity of our experience here at Church is overwhelming at times – and are we surprised? If you are like me, and your weeks are sometimes filled with chaos and distraction, then it is no wonder why it is hard to see through the humanity of the Mass. To let this defeat us is called “de-moralization”. And yet, there is Jesus, present on the altar, asking you: Will you let me feed you today?

Here is my point: when we come to Mass, Jesus wants to take those same human problems and limitations and meet you precisely *in* them. Notice that when He multiplies the loaves and fish, it happens in a strangely simple way. There is no flash of lightning, no levitation – He simply distributes them out and everyone has enough. That is always Jesus’ method: He never destroys our human experience, but rather works *through* it. God becomes a man – He enters every part of our human nature and gives it new meaning. That is what allows us to live with joy and hope in this life. When you come to Mass, the same thing is offered to you. Will you let Jesus feed you? You have the opportunity to bring all of your life to Him. He will take your ordinary human stuff, your suffering, your joy, your contrition and sorrow, and magnify your life with His Presence. Your suffering becomes His suffering. Your joy becomes His resurrected joy. Your contrition and repentance is transformed by His mercy. His Presence is here before us and is about to enter our lives through the Eucharist. Will you let Him feed you?

Today, right now, and every time we come here to Mass, there is a choice before us. Will we allow our human weakness to become an *obstacle* to Jesus’ Presence? Or, will we allow our humanity to open us up to His Presence? “Oh Father, this is too heady and complicated.” No, it’s really not. You know what I’m talking about. Think about your relationships. Married people especially know this. Your own weaknesses, ambitions, annoyances can become a wall that keeps your spouse out, or it can make you vulnerable to them. If we get this, then our experience at Mass can start to be different. I cannot judge my experience of Mass based on the length, or the screaming kid, or Father’s homily. The question that matters is: Did I let Jesus meet me today? Did I offer my humanity to Him again? Was I simple and humble and silent in His presence today?

When Christ ceases to be the living force in my life, my experience of Mass will be limited, and I am doomed to become de-moralized. *But today is a new day.* Jesus looks at you like He always does and asks: Will you let me feed you? That is why I need the Mass – I need Jesus to break into my life and multiply the loaves and fish – my humanity – into His Presence.