

## **JESUS FEEDS HIS PEOPLE – John 6:1-15**

*Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B*

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This week begins one of the most important parts of the Bible in the Gospel of John, chapter 6. It is the Bread of Life Discourse. For this and the next 4 weeks, Jesus is specifically teaching us about the Bread of Life. He does so as he feeds his people with his own body. The Bread of Life Discourse is really a lesson in the Mass – and all that happens when we gather here.

If you are like most of us - coming to Mass carries with it lots of mystery, which can be exciting as well as puzzling. There are the unknowns, feelings get stirred, and sometimes even a lack of interest when we don't know what is going on. The Mass is jam-packed with so many things that it is often challenging to understand what we do – and why we do it all. The Bread of Life Discourse in John, gives us something about which to meditate... And the fruit of this meditation will be a clearer appreciation of why we are here celebrating the Mass.

Today's Gospel story is the first part of the 5-part discourse: Jesus and his Apostles had gathered on a hillside, somewhere around mealtime, and there were at least 5,000 people sitting there. They had all come, like you and I, to encounter Jesus. They enjoyed listening to him – and wanted to apply his teachings to their lives. They wanted their lives to be better. So, they gathered to be together – some of them knew one another – others were strangers, yet they were all there for the same purpose. And, they shared something in common – they were hungry. They were physically hungry, of course. And they were spiritually hungry. This is a blatant lesson for us about the Mass: **we come here hungry**.

And ***Jesus feeds us through the Mass***. Through the Eucharist – a real human food – he feeds us in a supernatural way. The Eucharist is not just something to calm the growl of our stomachs. It calms the growl of our souls – we are fed spiritually. We are given the nourishment to live in a Christ-like manner.

Through the Mass, Jesus feeds us in such profound ways...but there are times we identify with the Apostles and miss what Christ is offering. **When you heard today's Gospel** – did you notice the three moments when the Apostles seemed to miss the most important things? These times were highlighted in the reactions of two Apostles and then the crowd. **Philip** – was concerned that there was no place they could buy food to feed this many people. And, if there was a store nearby, they didn't have that much money – 200 days wages. He was distracted with the human worries of life. He didn't turn to Jesus with the faith that Mary did at the Wedding Feast of Cana. Rather, Philip was plagued with doubt. **Peter** shared this distraction when he met that boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. Sure, this was food – typical of the time – and perhaps appealing to some. But it wasn't much. Peter seemed to make sense when he pointed out *"what good are these for so many?"* Once again, human limitation took center stage – and they didn't seem to know what to do. **The third reaction** came after Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding that many – the multiplication of the loaves (and fish). The crowd identified him as **a prophet** – sent by God. They were not yet at the point to say: "This is the Son of God." And **they didn't know that Jesus was foreshadowing his gift of his own Body and Blood in the Eucharist**. His multiplication of the loaves was a clear signal of what was going to happen at the Last Supper...and at every Mass for generations to come. The Apostle's human reaction clouded their vision – they struggled to fully see the presence of the divine.

**We all have the same temptations when we come to Mass...** and so we can identify with the struggle they were going through in the feeding of the 5,000. When you come to Mass – have you ever experienced one of these? If you have ever thought Mass was boring... Or that the music could be more entertaining... Or that Father should tell more jokes... Or that the temperature in church is too hot... or too cold... Or why do we have to kneel, and stand, and sit so much? Or why is that kid screaming in the back... Or you keep looking at your watch because this Mass is so much longer than the 35 minute Mass on the other side of town at St. XYZ Church and Shrine.... Or... I wonder what's for lunch or dinner? If you have focused on thoughts like these – you are just like the Apostles. I like to call that normal human nature. ***We all deal with thoughts like these at times...*** And, like the Apostles in the Gospel, we focus on our own perspective... Or what we perceive are problems... So much so, that we lose sight of God and what he is trying to offer us.

**The Apostles on the hillside with the 5,000 were so focused on the size of the crowd, the little amount of food they had, and the risk that these people would get “hangry” ...** That they missed out on the key God moments. **All these people were there to meet their Savior. Jesus was there** – and he is God. Jesus had just performed an incredible miracle – he fed 5,000 people from 5 loaves and 2 fish. Wow! They missed the divine nature of this fact too. God had come to meet his people where they were.

At Mass, we are tempted like the Apostles to miss out on the incredible miracle that Jesus performs – when he turns simple flat wheat bread and basic table wine... Into his body and blood. So that we can do something that looks human... EAT. And experience the reality of something divine... JESUS' BODY AND BLOOD.

In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus shows us how much our God respects the dignity of our human nature – created in the image and likeness of God. And he honors us by providing what we truly need to be nourished in both body and soul.

As we continue this journey together... We acknowledge how the Apostles on the hillside saw a problem... While Jesus saw an opportunity full of possibility. When we come to Mass... Let's take the opportunity to see the Mass more like Christ does... To set aside our human worries... And then thank him for the gift of his body and blood that he brings us through the Mass.