

40 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B July 25, 2021
2Kings 4:42-44 Psalm 145 Ephesians 4:1-6 John 6:1-13

We will be interrupting St. Mark's Gospel for the next four Sundays to read Chapter six of St. John's Gospel which contains Jesus' *teaching about Himself* as the *Bread of Life*. It is an opportunity for a summertime reflection on the Holy Eucharist, what the Eucharist is, and what it can mean for us in our life.

Before going any further, it is important to have an overview of Chapter Six of St. John's Gospel which is divided into four basic sections: first, the multiplication of the loaves; second, Jesus walking on the water; third, His discourse that He is the *Bread of Life*; and finally, the positive and negative reactions to Jesus' teaching.

St. John has written today's Gospel in such a way that we are drawn to see that it *reflects the four parts of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*. Do you know the four parts of the Mass? The Gospel opens, in St. John's words, with a "*large crowd following*" Jesus. The "*large crowd*" is the *first part* our Mass, the *Gathering Rite* when Jesus welcomes us to our Sunday Mass celebration. . The Mass is the celebration of the "*large crowd*" of Catholics throughout the world following Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is not a private devotion or the privilege of a few.

This gathering takes place on two levels. On one level, there is the gathering of individuals into community. The Gathering Rite of the Mass tells us that we recognize Jesus' presence in those gathered around us as together we prepare to celebrate the Mass.

On the second level, there is a gathering within ourselves that must also take place. When we arrive at church for Mass, we need some time to gather our thoughts and prepare ourselves for the upcoming Mass. For this reason, it is important to arrive at church early to sit or kneel in silent reflection. This allows us to gather our thoughts and begin focusing our attention away from ourselves and onto God in the Holy Mass.

The "*large crowd*" of people hunger to hear Jesus' words. This is our *second part* of the Mass, *the Liturgy of the Word*. *The Liturgy of the Word* is where Christ speaks to us as a Church, as a parish and as individuals. Through the *Liturgy of the Word*, God's speaks to us in the Old Testament, in the Psalms, in the Letters in the New Testament

and in the Gospel. It is important that we listen to God's Word speaking in our hearts. After listening to God's Word, we make our Profession of Faith in Him.

After teaching the people, Jesus notices the crowd is hungry for physical food. St. John observes that when it is time to feed the people, the Apostle Andrew brings a boy forward who has five loaves of barley bread, the bread of the poor people, and a couple of fish, which the boy offers to Jesus. The quantity of food the boy has seems insignificant compared to the need of so many people.

In the same way at Mass, during the *Offertory* people bring forward bread and wine to begin the preparation of the gifts on the altar. These people are like that boy in the Gospel and the gifts they present to the priest also seem insignificant in comparison with what they will become.

We now enter into the *third part* of the Mass, *the Liturgy of the Eucharist*. In the Gospel, Jesus performs Eucharistic actions. The gestures and the words He uses are the exact same ones He used in the Institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper: *"He took the bread . . . blessed it . . . broke it . . . and gave it to them."*

The action of Christ in the Gospel story looks exactly like what happens at the Mass. The priest, who is in the person of Christ, takes the bread . . . blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the people. During the Consecration, we hear the priest pray that the bread and wine *"become the Body and Blood of Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose command we celebrate these mysteries."*

When the priest, in the person of Christ, prays the words of Consecration over the bread and wine, by the power of the Holy Spirit acting through Jesus, the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This is known as *transubstantiation*. Although we cannot actually see it happening, let's keep our eyes and our hearts open as we witness the Eucharistic miracle that is taking place on the altar of our own Church.

It is Christ Himself, living, glorious, *truly and really present*, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. Every single bit of bread and every last drop of wine have been completely changed. No trace of bread and wine remains except in mere appearance. Though the appearance of bread and wine remains so that we will be able to receive Holy Communion, they have both truly become Christ.

Then at Holy Communion, the priest distributes the bread, which is now the Real Presence of Christ: Body, Blood and Soul and Divinity. We hear the priest say, "*The Body of Christ*" and we respond, "*Amen*" means we truly believe this is the Body of Christ. When we say "*Amen*," as we receive Holy Communion, we are not only making an affirmation of our faith, "*I believe*," but that we are also making a promise to follow Christ faithfully.

In receiving the Holy Eucharist, we know that Jesus is *really present with us*, but *how present are we to Him*? How many people have forgotten that Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is *alive*? How many people who wait in line are thinking about how much Jesus wants to unite Himself to those who receive Him? How many people are actually filled with awe and gratitude that Jesus loves them so much as to come to them in such an incredible humble and intimate way?

Finally, in the *fourth part* of the Mass, "*the Commissioning*," we are sent forth to be the Body of Christ to all people we meet. At the end of the Mass you are commissioned to "*Go forth*" and proclaim the Good News you have heard to other people you meet. As followers of Christ, we are called to share this message with others. When words are difficult we can share the Gospel by our example and by our actions.

There is still more in today's Gospel miracle, and that is what is *left over*. There are plenty of leftovers that we will take from our gathering today. One leftover is *grace*. Grace, the presence of the Holy Spirit, will continue to feed us throughout this coming week. Grace opens our hearts to touch others with the abundant love we have received from Our Lord.

Another leftover is *thanksgiving*. We gather to give thanks to Jesus who feeds us through the Holy Scriptures and through His most Precious Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, making us more thankful people. As thankful people we have been blessed by God with the miraculous gift of faith and abundant reserves of graces sufficient to meet our deepest hungers in life.

Each of us, in a sense, is part of what is left over, a sacrament, a hidden presence of Jesus, a Eucharist, carried into every street, workplace, school, and our family. Jesus is present in the world because of *our* presence in the world.

Today's story in the Gospel makes us think about thanking Jesus for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For without the Mass there would be no Holy Eucharist that nourishes our spiritual life and for having our life *in Christ*. Jesus wants to do more than sustain our earthly lives, He wants to give us *eternal life*.

For the next four Sundays, we will be hearing the next three parts of this sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and with each Sunday we will see more deeply into the meaning of the Holy Eucharist. Try reading the entire sixth chapter in one sitting which will only take you five minutes to read. That will help you to prepare yourself for next Sunday's Gospel reading and understand the *Doctrine of the Most Holy Eucharist which every Catholic must believe*.