

TRINITY 8/ORD 17 – 2021

2 Kgs 4:42-44

Eph 4 :1-6

Jn 6:1-15

Two of today's readings are about numbers of people being adequately fed with inadequate food supplies. Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty loaves and a little grain while Jesus fed 5000 with 5 loaves and two fish. In both cases there was food left over.

St John describes the feeding of the 5000 by Lake Galilee and specifically mentions that it occurred shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover. Passover is the greatest of all Jewish festivals, during which Jews remember their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and being led by Moses through the Red Sea and the wilderness to the Promised Land. St John wants us to understand this miracle against the backdrop of the Passover.

During the exodus from Egypt, God fed the people with manna from heaven, the food of angels (Wisdom 16:20-21). Later Jewish writings expressed the hope that the Messiah would begin to be revealed and manna would again descend from heaven before the end of time (2 Baruch 29:3;8). The Jewish belief expresses the hope that this would occur when the prophet that Moses promised would follow him, is revealed. We Christians of course consider Jesus to be that person.

What did Jesus do on that hillside? If we think of it as feeding 5000, we are focussing on physical food as was the case in Elisha's miracle. John tells us it is more than that. The first temptation Jesus faced and rejected in the wilderness was to feed the hungry by turning the stones into bread. If he did that the crowds would follow him, but only as long as the food and healings were supplied. Jesus later accuses the crowds of doing just that (Jn 6: 26-27).

Even so, the crowds were hungry so Jesus teases Philip by asking him where he could buy bread. Earlier in John's gospel, the guest master at the wedding in Cana did not know where the wine came from. The woman at Jacob's well did not know where the springs of living water would come from, and now Philip doesn't know where the bread will come from. Andrew points to 5 loaves and 2 fish that a small boy had, but what use would they be? Andrew was about to see that like the water at Cana of Galilee, the loaves and fish could be transformed if they were offered to God.

Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it just as he did during another Passover Festival in Jerusalem on the night before he was crucified. At that time he said, "This is my body which will be give up for you" (Mk 14:22).

John doesn't record Jesus breaking and sharing bread during the Last Supper but following the feeding of the 5000, Jesus teaches the crowd that He himself is the bread of life who comes down from heaven and whoever comes and believes in him shall not hunger nor thirst. More than that, those who feed on the truth that Jesus has revealed and persevere to the end will be saved.

When we receive the Sacred body and blood of Jesus in the mass we are in unity with Christ and each other. We become caught up in the life of the Holy Trinity who is the perfect unity of love. Our response to receiving the sacrament must be that which St Paul tells the Ephesians, namely, to develop the Christ like qualities of humility, gentleness and patience in the way we relate to our fellow believers so that non-believers may come to acknowledge that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all.

It is true to say that one reason some people do not become Christians is because there is not much evidence of Christian joy in the lives of some who claim to be. The lives of faithful Christians speak much louder than their words.

Msgr Harry Entwistle  
July 2021