

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This Sunday takes us from the Gospel according to Mark to that of John's and immediately we are present to witness one of the more impressive signs of the Gospel according to John, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. Here's a clue that helps us in interpreting the Gospels. Whenever food is served, many other important things are going on. Pay attention.

Scholars like to point out that there are two references to abundance in the story. First, there is the abundance of the crowd. Five thousand people would be huge for the time. Five thousand of anything would be worth noticing. Secondly, there is the abundance of food that was served. Everyone had their fill from the five loaves and two fish and there were leftovers: twelve baskets filled to the brim with bread. Apparently all the fish were eaten. Between the lines of this story is the deeper story of God's abundant love. It will always be more than enough.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 6:1-15

Oddly enough, there is no account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Gospel according to John. This is all the more ironic in that John devotes a few chapters to what happened at the Last Supper. The great ritual described is the washing of the feet and not the breaking of the bread. Does that mean that there's nothing about the Eucharist in this Gospel? Not so. It's here and it starts with the feeding of the 5,000. Notice the words chosen to describe the beginning of this meal. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and had it distributed to the people. In a few more verses, Jesus will say that he is the bread of life.

On the surface we have the story of multiplying loaves and fish. Deeper down, we have the story that God will provide all that we need, even when we are on a distant mountain, far away from home. All this is highly symbolic. It calls for us to trust that God will be generous in providing for us. Of course, God will usually use others as part of the story. Here, it's a boy who just happened to have enough to start the meal. God did the rest. This, too, is a miracle.

Thought for the Week

Bread for the World is a well-known organization pledged to alleviate world hunger. Many smaller organizations, including many Catholic parishes, do what they can do to provide food for those who can't afford buying it. Feeding the hungry is one of the traditional corporal works of mercy. We are told that there are many who do not have enough to eat even in this country. How ironic, especially when we seem to have an epidemic of obesity these days.

Food is also a symbol for life itself. So another meaning of the story is that we are to share our lives, our time, and our energy with others. Jesus came to give his life for us. That's one of the most basic truths of our faith. This is also at the heart of family life, the sharing of life, the giving of one's life for others. Because it is so commonplace, it may be overlooked as important. That's another quality of bread. It's among the most common of all foods. But taken the right way, it can mean a lot more.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

Sometimes we find ourselves hungry, like those gathered on the mountainside to hear Jesus. Overworked parents sometimes overlook taking care of their own needs. They say that the children come first. But what happens when a person just gives and gives and gives? We all know the answer. They end up bitter and broken and everyone loses, especially the children.

So learn to recognize the hunger experienced through parenting. Constantly tired, maybe a little down in spirit, and perhaps feeling sorry for oneself? Such a parent may need nourishment. Bread can take the form of a restful hour or two on one's own, a quiet walk in the neighborhood, a pleasant conversation with one's spouse or a close friend.

God does not want us to walk around empty inside. You are always invited to God's banquet of life. But you have to come and take your seat at the table. You will not be forced. We were not created to be hungry.

Car or Meal Talk

Have any of us every really been hungry?
And how many ways are there to be hungry?

One-Line Prayer

Dear Lord, give us this day our daily bread.
Amen.