



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

July 26, 2015

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel reading John 6:1-15 [To be read aloud]

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Brief commentary:

Throughout the summer portion of Ordinary Time the readings have emphasized the prophetic message and the prophetic mission of Jesus Christ. They have thus emphasized the prophetic mission of the people of God, the meaning of following Jesus' example and of extending his prophetic mission in the world. Today we find in the readings that, essential to the prophetic *message*, is prophetic *action* on behalf of those who lack the essentials of life: last week we read about a Jesus who *taught*, today of one who follows up his message with the *action* of serving people in their need. In the first reading we find the prophet Elisha doing the sort of things that make a difference in people's lives, such as feeding the hungry. The psalm today calls us to praise the Lord "who feeds us and answers all our needs." And following Elisha's example, through whose ministry God multiplied loaves of bread for the people to eat, Jesus too feeds the people through the ministry of his disciples. The parallels between the two accounts are obvious: concern for the hungry, through human agents God grants sustenance, out of a few loaves many are fed, and there was also plenty of left over at the end. The sign is significant: God is concerned about the welfare of people and calls on us to attend to one another's essential needs. Like with Phillip, Jesus calls on us to notice those in need and to begin asking "How shall they be fed?" Sometimes the needs in our communities, our society and our world seem so great that we are tempted to despair, become frustrated and resort to inaction. Yet, today's message is very clear: whatever we can offer, even if it is tiny (such as the boy's five loaves and two fish), in the hands of the Lord these efforts and resources of ours can be multiplied beyond our wildest dreams. It takes, however, generosity such as the boy had in offering his meager gifts, the faith that the disciples had in following Jesus' seemingly absurd instructions, and the concern Jesus had in feeding the hungry. No doubt today's gospel reminds us of how God fed the Hebrew multitude in the desert as Moses led them to the land of abundance; Jesus' actions likewise express God's providence in and for the world. Throughout the next few Sundays we will continue to read from the discourses about the "living Bread come down from heaven" from John's gospel. But today we are shown how this bread of the Eucharist is 'the bread of the poor and hungry', and Eucharist should always remind us of our sisters and brothers who lack bread, of those who hunger for justice and peace, for love and compassion and for hope. No wonder the people got it right when they exclaimed: "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Yet, Jesus' prophetic mission was to be even far more than meeting people's essential needs. By refusing to be made into a "king" who solved the symptoms of sin like poverty, he showed that he was far more than a social reformer, politician or economist – as good as they may be – but rather Jesus has 'come into the world' as its source of salvation *from* all distances us from God and from one another, and the source that frees us to be able to return to God and to truly love one another.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- The prophetic mission involves action on behalf of the poor, hungry and oppressed, just as it is to speak boldly on their behalf.
- God's concern for people's welfare is evident throughout the witness of the Scriptures. All who are allied to God must likewise respond to the needs in our world.
- More than a prophet, social activist or reformer, Jesus is foremost the Savior of the world who has come to save us *from* the evils in our hearts that destroys us and our world and save us *for* the love that transforms and gives life to all, the love that each of us is capable of.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- What are the hungers in our community, in our society and world?
- What talents, what gifts, what resources and efforts, can I offer Jesus Christ and his Church so that 'the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, the oppressed are released, the prisoners are set free, and the poor hear the good news'?
- What does the Eucharist call me to?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 543-55, 2443-49