

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee—or of Tiberias—and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave of curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of the Passover. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted.' So they picked them up and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given said, 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, who could see that they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

(John 6:1-15)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Sea of Tiberias and as Lake Gennesaret, both of which were sizeable towns on the Lake's western shore.
- The Philip of this episode is mentioned in all four apostolic lists (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13). He came from Bethsaida on the northern shores of the lake and is referred to most often in John's Gospel.
- Two hundred denarii is a large sum of money. A denarius was a Roman silver coin, and one denarius represented a worker's daily wage.
- 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.' One of the great symbols of the coming of the Messiah often used in the Hebrew Scriptures was the abundant feast. Here Jesus provides abundantly; thus he is presented as 'the prophet who is to come'.
- The twelve hampers' full that were gathered up could well represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus gathers all the people to himself.
- God fed the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven.

EXPLORING THE WORD

For the next five weeks, we will follow the story of the multiplication miracle and the long discourse that follows it in John's Gospel. The 'bread of life' discourse provides important teaching on the Eucharist. It is significant that the setting is shortly before the Passover, which was the Jewish feast recalling the escape of the people from slavery in Egypt and their being fed by God with bread (manna) from heaven in the desert. One of the expected signs of the coming of the Messiah was another, even greater, feeding with manna. The people have been attracted to Jesus because of his cures of the sick and now they come looking for more.

Jesus provides more than enough; there is an abundance. The actions of Jesus in this text remind us of the Eucharist. He takes, gives thanks and gives out the bread. But the crowd misunderstands his gift. They seek a Messiah who will liberate them from Roman oppression or who will provide for their material needs. Jesus is not interested in being that kind of 'king'.

- Is it possible that sometimes we expect Jesus to be something other than he is. We may try to make him fit our mould rather than us fitting his mould. What expectations do you have of Jesus? Are they realistic?
- What hunger do you hope Jesus will fill in you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In what ways are you being fed and nourished on your journey towards baptism?
- Try to provide what others need this week.
- What 'hungers' may have driven the vast crowd to follow Jesus? Reflect together a little on what our world today is hungering for. What great needs in our world need to be met? What are you hungering for at this point in your life?
- Use today's psalm response this week:

*The hand of the Lord feeds us,
He answers all our needs.*

