

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Readings and Commentary Year B

Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: The miracle of an abundance of food around the time of Passover comes to us twice this week, both in the Second Book of Kings and the Gospel of John. We will be reading from John for the next several weeks, celebrating the 'bread of life' discourse, for which this miracle sets the scene. John makes the mention of the time of year explicit, but the miracle of Elisha does it by saying that the loaves were of the first fruits of the barley harvest. Passover was, in part, a feast of the barley harvest. In this way John invokes the miracle of Elisha, who was the disciple and successor of Elijah, the prophet who was to return at the end of time. The miracle in the Gospel is therefore another sign of the arrival of the kingdom of God today, the end times. The psalm supports the image of God as the source of all the food we eat.

The second reading is Paul's call to unity for the Ephesians. While it is less well known than the passage in first Corinthians, it is a beautiful meditation on how unity and right living is required not as a something we need to live in order to gain God's favor, but something we live because we have already been loved and called by God. The gift of God's love fills our lives, and so we respond by living in God.

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First Reading 2 Kings 4:42-44

They shall eat and there shall be some left over.

A reading from the second Book of Kings

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God,
twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits,

and fresh grain in the ear.
Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat."
But his servant objected,
"How can I set this before a hundred people?"
Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat."
"For thus says the LORD,
'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'"
And when they had eaten, there was some left over,
as the LORD had said.

The word of the Lord

2 Kings 4:42-44 Commentary by Deacon Owen

Cummings: There are three brief points that emerge in this short reading from 2 Kings. First, it treats of God's desire to satisfy human hunger. In verse 38, prior to our reading, we are told "there was a famine in the land." The prophet Elisha is involved with God in satisfying the hunger that the famine has wrought. Elisha's servant objects that twenty barley loaves cannot possibly feed a hundred men, but they do, and there is bread left over. God satisfies human hunger. Second, the passage connects with the gospel reading from St. John concerning the miraculous feeding of other people with barley loaves, this time five. There are twelve baskets left over so that the Twelve can feed the world's multitudes with God's generous gift of eucharistic bread. God's desire to satisfy the hungry comes to completion in his gift of himself in Jesus, the living bread come down from heaven.

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Second Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

One body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

I, a prisoner for the Lord,
urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,

with all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another through love,
striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the
bond of peace:

one body and one Spirit,
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

The word of the Lord

Ephesians 4:1-6 Commentary by Tom Conry: This section of Ephesians begins the body of the letter, which is largely made up of exhortations to the hearers to lead a Christian life. Today's reading is the first of these preachments, urging the assembly to maintain unity and group solidarity. The unity of all Christians is a theme that occurs in Ephesians several times, and, when we place these repeated appeals next to the more mundane items listed in the household code (5:22-6:9), we can pretty well tell that this letter is addressed to a community that is conflicted over the contradictions between the message of freedom that came through so strongly in the earlier Pauline epistles (e.g. Thessalonians and Galatians) and a static social situation which increasingly led them to conclude that the end of the world was a long way away. Ephesians depicts an assembly struggling to find a way to live in the here and now in light of the earlier, more radical promises of communal autonomy and a general lack of restrictions, promises that made Christianity attractive and competitive with pagan religions in syncretic Western Asia.

Gospel John 6:1-15

He distributed as much as they wanted to those who were reclining.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

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.

The Gospel of the Lord

John 6:1-15 Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: Jesus NOURISHES us in an OVERABUNDANT way. It was expected that in the messianic age there would be an extraordinary banquet in which God, in the manner of a shepherd, would lavishly feed the people (sheep) of Israel. God fulfills this promise in a unique and unexpected way through Jesus in today's gospel reading. Jesus' command to have the people "recline" underscores the banquet character of the miraculous feeding about to occur. The notice that "there was a great deal of grass in that place" recalls how God as shepherd promises to feed his people in good or green pastures (Ps 23:2; Ezek 34:14). Not only did the crowd have as much of the bread and fish that Jesus distributed to them as they wanted, but there is an overabundance of leftovers--"twelve wicker baskets with fragments" (symbolically, one for each of the traditional twelve tribes of Israel). Whereas the prophet Elisha overabundantly fed one hundred with twenty barley loaves (2 Kgs 4:42-44), Jesus overabundantly feeds five thousand with only five barely loaves and two fish.

But the leftover fragments need to be gathered "so that nothing will be wasted." Miraculous as it is, this bread is

perishable. It is thus a "sign" that points to the overabundant way that Jesus feeds us with the bread of imperishable, eternal life--his own body--in the Eucharistic banquet.

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