

Homily 17th Sunday of Ordinary time. Year B 2021.

The readings for this Sunday set the scene for some of the most important Gospel readings in the three year cycle for on these Sundays we will hear of the great gift of the Eucharist that Jesus gives us; his Body and Blood.

St John has not record of the Eucharist in his account of the Last Supper, but unpacks its meaning through Jesus' words spoken at the synagogue in Capernaum. During this cycle of Year B, Jesus' instruction will be broken up by two Feasts of the Church, that of our own St Mary of the Cross, and the great feast of the Assumption. St Mary of the Cross adored Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament so it is most appropriate that her feast should occur within Jesus' teaching. Our Lady held the Bread of Life in her very womb so again there is no question of the appropriateness of her great feast at this time. August is indeed a glorious month in Year B.

Jesus will tell us that unless we eat his Body and drink his Blood we will have no life in us. This is the reason we come to worship together so that we can receive him and have the life we need to share this great news with others. Not only does he feed us with his very Body and Blood, but through his Holy Spirit gives us the words we need as we unpack his Word to us. In this way we are empowered and sustained as we share Jesus' love with all. There is literally no other way for us to keep going as disciples. What an incredible gift we are considering. One of the saddest things at present is that so many in the Church put Jesus' gift of his very self to one side and try to rely on and fall in love with the ways of the World.

This week we begin with the feeding of the 5000+. After this event the crowds will follow Jesus back to Capernaum looking for more "fast food". Jesus will begin by reminding them not to labour for the food which perishes, but for that which leads to eternal life. It will transpire that that food is none other than Jesus himself.

The Old Testament reading points us to Elisha and his feeding of the 100. This sounds poultry (pardon the pun), compared to Jesus' miracle, but left the bystanders amazed. Elisha, however, knew that it pointed to the power of God's word not his own power. It reminds us of the importance of our acting as God commands even in what seems to be the most hopeless situation. "That's impossible", we want to say, BUT, 'nothing is impossible for God'. This is not about having enough faith to "make God do stuff", but about obeying Jesus' command to love trusting that the Lord will provide as is needed. And it will get done!!!

This was part of the lesson the disciples had to learn as they were faced with the hungry crowds. Trust and obey, as the hymn says. Jesus was more than able to bring about the feeding of the crowd because he was always relying on the Father's leading and power through God the Holy Spirit. That the disciples could rely on this power too was something they struggled with, and so did the crowds. It wasn't really until after the Resurrection that the disciples began to understand this.

The crowds saw a new leader who could provide and give them what they wanted, power. Finally they could use this person to get what they wanted, power indeed. It would have been an easy way for Jesus to get power of them too. Just as the woman at the well wished for Jesus to give a constant supply of water so she wouldn't have to return to the well all the time, so they wanted Jesus to be a leader who would provide the easy way for them. "Fast food" is popular, but in the

end it fails to satisfy. It makes us hungry for more and makes us demand more delivered more quickly. How true this of all the World offers. Bread and circuses only satisfy for a time then we want more. The people love this miracle and are amazed alright, but Jesus resists the temptation to get sucked in to the popularity and heads for the hills. Even though at least some of the crowds will follow him to Capernaum, Jesus will continue to resist the temptation to quick and easy kingship and will set them straight on the food they should be after. Ultimately this will leave him surrounded by the 12 alone, but this will be the right way to go because it will bring him to the moment when he will give the gift that doesn't just feed 5000+, but will feed the whole world and bring eternal life.

Jesus shows that we can trust and obey. He also shows that we must continue to focus on what really counts and not jump for supposedly quick solutions that seem easy. In the coming weeks we will go on to show what we really do need, himself. As we wait during lockdown for the next moment when together we can receive him, may the Lord Jesus strengthen us through his Word and prepare us for the Bread of Life.