

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

2 Kings 4:42-44

Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

Ephesians 4:1-6

John 6:1-15

Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.

The Garaventa Center

The University of Portland

"Jesus took the loaves of bread, gave thanks, and passed them around to those reclining there; he did the same with the fish." It must have been quite a picnic on that crowded, grassy hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Most of the people were strangers to one another. But Jesus touched their hearts, and they were able to break bread together -- bread they took from the hands of our Savior himself. It must have been a wonderfully peaceful and joyful meal. If I could travel in time, I think that hillside, on that afternoon, would be my first destination. It wouldn't matter that I didn't speak the language. Every one would simply assume that I was a traveler from somewhere over the next mountain.

Christian tradition has always associated the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, with the Eucharist. Early Christians scratched pictures of loaves and fishes onto the walls of the catacombs, to represent the Eucharistic feast. And today's Gospel *is* a powerfully effective symbol of the Eucharist, because it reminds us that the Sacrament is intended to be a *meal* that people share with one another. It is a communion between God and each one of us. But it is also a communion among all of us who gather to worship together. And God is really present, not only in the Blessed Sacrament, but also in the people with whom we pray.

When I was in the seminary, we had a special custom at Mass. At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, everyone would leave their pews

and crowd into the sanctuary, in a big semi-circle around the altar. And there we would stay until after we received Communion. Sometimes, during the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament and the Precious Blood, my eyes would stray beyond the chalice and paten to the faces of the other worshippers -- the priests and brothers and seminarians of my order, their families and their guests. I was moved by their faith and devotion, or even amused by their sleepiness or distraction. For a while I tried to break myself of the habit, until it occurred to me that wherever I looked at that moment, I was looking at Christ.

So, when I was a seminarian, the place where I stood for the Eucharistic celebration, gave me an insight into the meaning of the Sacrament. The same is true when I sometimes assist at our local cathedral. When I stand behind the altar and lift up the chalice and paten, I can see past them, to the great stained glass windows and other works of art where angels and saints are pictured, as if they were reverently joining in our worship. And, of course, they *are* present. We proclaim it every day in the Eucharistic prayer. Christ has given victory over death to all the holy men and women who make up the Communion of saints. They join their prayers to ours in every Mass.

Especially in the summer the congregations at our cathedral are wonderfully diverse. Every weekend we welcome people from all over the world. But in the Eucharist, we are joined by Christians of every *time* as well as every place. It's as if we had a Roman centurion in the third pew, with a medieval queen across the aisle, and a cluster of early Irish monks toward the back. We share the same faith, the same Sacrament. When we say "we" we include them. And we all live in Christ. So in fact you and I needn't travel through time to join the joyful crowd on that peaceful

hillside in ancient Palestine. Every Mass in every parish *is* that hillside.
They are with us.