

Homily: 17th Sunday Cycle B: 2021 2 Kgs 4: 42-44; Ps 145; Eph 4:1-6; Jn 6: 1-15

“The Beginning of the Bread of Life Discourse, the Deeper Meaning of Miracles, and Every Person being Important in God’s eyes”

For the next five weeks we will be hearing from the Gospel of John chapter 6, which is the definitive teaching of Jesus on the miracle of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, which is His lasting gift to the Catholic Church that He Himself founded. It is a good time to reflect on the meaning of the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass which is where God gives us the gift of the Eucharist.

1. Today both in the 1st reading from Kings and in the Gospel passage from John we see a miracle of bread occurring. God truly gives in abundance in both situations. There is more than enough in the end, even though in the beginning of each passage in human understanding there was not enough bread to feed everyone. Oneness and fullness flow from the one God who has dominion over the universe. **The sign of the feeding of the multitude which Jesus brings about shows truly that Jesus is God and can accomplish what He promises in His teaching. This miracle is meant to be a sign for the crowd to make a decision for or against Jesus.** When we encounter the Eucharist we also in essence have to make a decision for or against Jesus. Do we believe He is truly present BODY, BLOOD, SOUL, and DIVINITY in the Eucharist or is it just a nice symbol of the Last Supper? Are we spiritually preparing our hearts, souls and lives properly to receive Him (see *1 Corth 11: 17-34*) with deep faith? And if we are struggling with our Faith in the Eucharist, are we asking God to help us and deepen our Faith or do we just live in a spirit of doubt and/or indifference?
2. The people in today’s discourse from John “see” only the exterior miraculous character of the sign of the bread and fish, but unfortunately fail to grasp the deeper inner spiritual meaning of the miracle. How do we know this? Well, they want to go off and make Jesus king in a temporal sense, so He can take care of their material needs. **As we will see in the coming weeks, Jesus is not impressed with the passing enthusiasm of people which stops short of real Faith in Him and His message of saving truth.** The human spirit is indeed fickle. We pastors

know this well: when you do what ppl like they love you; when you make hard decisions - not so much! **The inner significance** of today's miracle of the loaves and the fishes is that it authenticates Jesus's startling claims in the ensuing dialog of He truly being the "bread that came down from Heaven" to feed people's souls and bring them salvation. **It is so easy to misinterpret physical miracles, then and now.** To see miracles, which are occurrences that go beyond the natural explanation of physics, medicine and science: be it an unexplained healing, food being multiplied without explanation, or occurrences such as weeping or bleeding statues, people with the stigmata, etc., is amazing, e.g. the Divine Mercy Picture in Stockbridge crying tears of oil; the statue of Our Lady crying tears of blood at Akita, Japan (have both as screensavers on my phone to remind me of the wonders of God); but in the end if people see miracles as nothing more than amazing wonderworks of God for show, kind of a supernatural Ripley's Believe it or Not, rather than what they are meant to be: which is to increase people's faith in the one true God, to see the Catholic Church as the ark of salvation for the human race, and to bring about a moral and spiritual conversion of hearts, is to badly miss the mark. **By their fruits you will know them, for remember the devil also can perform physical prodigies and appear as an angel of light,** e.g., the guy throwing a fireball in Trinidad at a holy priest, some people with the stigmata in history, fortune tellers, mediums, etc. This is also the reason, in case you ever wondered, why Church authorities usually don't get too hyped up about apparitions, statues bleeding, etc. Time proves whether they are valid or not, from God or not, after serious scientific (isn't the Church against science? humm) and religious investigation. Miraculous occurrences on the physical level are **supplements for, but not a replacement for** believing in **the Deposit of Faith** made known to us through the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, participating in the sacraments, and cultivating a deep spirit of prayer and living an upright moral life, which is **the normal path to holiness for every person**. St. John of the Cross and St. Therese of Lisieux both prayed that God NOT give them miraculous or extraordinary things in their spiritual life, e.g., ecstasies and visions. Why? Because they were afraid of becoming proud and wanted instead to

follow the humble, little, way of sacrifice and embracing Jesus and His Cross more and more in daily life. **After all, Jesus saved us through the Cross and NOT through His miracles which simply were signs pointing to His supreme act of self-giving love on the Cross.** Something to ponder. Similarly the miracle of the Eucharist is meant to be the food to nourish us spiritually, so that we can lay down our life on the Cross for the love of God and the salvation of our neighbor- as well as our self - in union with Christ (see Romans 12: 1-2).

3. A final point that really should hit us spiritually in the heart from this beginning of the bread of life discourse is **the little boy** who gave Jesus his five barley loaves and two fishes as the base for the miracle. **It shows us that nobody is insignificant or incapable of contributing to the proclamation and spread of the Gospel/Catholic Faith and Jesus's kingdom.** As St. Therese once said, Jesus takes the little scraps of our lives and turns them into something beautiful and bountiful if we simply say: *Lord I give you what I have at this moment right now.* We often sell ourselves short in God's eyes because we are not doing "anything great", in our limited human estimation. But always remember: **God's standards are different from humans.** May we not sell ourselves short, but in humility, like the little boy in the Gospel today, give to the Lord what we have right now, namely, our life/vocation in whatever shape it is at present. He will always accept our "little" offering. Our Heavenly Father will help us to change for the better in His love and mercy, and will turn us into something beautiful (*St. Therese's Little Way*), namely, we will be molded more and more into His image of love and goodness, in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit – that is holiness. **TRUST GOD - HE LOVES YOU AND ME BEYOND OUR IMAGINING!** Please take some time this week and read through chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel, in anticipation of the next few Sundays, and ask the Lord to speak to you in your heart; He will - in surprising and profound ways! God bless you.