

THE EMMAUS SERIES

17th Sunday Year B

2 Kings 4:42-44

Ephesians 4:1-6

Gospel: John 6:1-15

Jesus gave the loaves out to all

Our gospel readings from Mark have brought us to his account – typically brief – of the feeding of the crowd with the loaves and fishes. The liturgy of this and the next four Sundays develops this theme by switching to readings from the extended meditation on the Eucharist in the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel. (A comparison of the two gospels shows that, in this chapter, John follows a sequence of events that Mark had adopted before him.)

As we become familiar with the style of John's gospel, we recognise that today's account of the feeding of the crowd – the introductory section of this long meditation - has strong overtones of the Eucharistic celebration: it is announced that the 'feast of Passover' is approaching; Jesus 'gives thanks' as at the Last Supper; Jesus himself distributes the loaves to all present.

This incident reminds us that the Saviour, whose Paschal Mystery we share in as we celebrate the Mass, is concerned for the welfare of God's people at every level. We must have a concern for our brothers and sisters that is more than words and pious thoughts, if we are to show in our lives the true fruits of the Paschal Mystery. It has often been pointed out that, in the miraculous feeding of the crowd, Jesus called upon the generosity of collaborators. The 'small boy' was certainly generous to give up his meal when asked for it. But he was to see his generosity make possible an explosion of divine generosity that is still remembered as we tell the story of Jesus. Surely, there is a clear lesson here for disciples of every age.

As we will find so often, the divine simplicity of the essential message of the Scriptures makes it easy to link the second reading with the central theme of the liturgy. Our reading from Ephesians speaks of our Christian communion – the sharing in the Paschal Mystery that unites the Christian community. This passage speaks of the unselfish charity and the unity that should mark communities brought together by the 'vocation', or God-given calling, which they have received.

The charity that binds the Christian community is the practical expression of the unity established by the Saviour's Paschal Mystery. Our reading from Ephesians reminds us that the roots of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit, as we become 'one Body', are very deep. We have 'one and the same hope' of eternal life with our God in a new creation; we have only 'one Lord', the Saviour who is also our brother, 'one faith' in what God has done for us in Christ, 'one baptism' in which we have died and risen to new life in him, and 'one God who is Father of all' in whom we can place all our trust.

The Eucharist, Vatican II insistently tells us, is the 'basis and centre' of the Church's life. It is not surprising that the same term 'communion' is used for all that we share 'in Christ' and for our sharing in the Eucharistic celebration.

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