

Homily – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B 2018
by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS

We will take today and the next four Sundays
exploring one chapter of St. John's Gospel.
It's the story about Jesus feeding more than 5,000 people.
He starts with five loaves of barley bread and two fish.
The Gospel of John not only tells that story
but goes into great depth sifting through the meaning of the story.

There's an important thing to point out about the Gospel of John.
If you go to the story of the last supper there,
you'll notice that there's something missing.
St. John says nothing about Jesus taking bread and wine
praying over them, and giving them to the disciples,
claiming that they are his body and blood.
In place of that, you'll find the story
about Jesus washing the feet of the disciples.
John leaves it to us readers to figure out the connection between
these two stories.

In the Gospel of John, this story about Jesus feeding all those people
is Jesus teaching about the meaning
of what we do here so often and why we do it.

To zoom ahead a couple of centuries for a moment,
the very first document of the great ecumenical council called Vatican
II was the one having to do with our coming together
at moments such as this.

The Council called what we do here
"the source and summit" of Christian life.
It said that no other action of the Church can match it in importance.
The Council claims that what we do here is
"the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful
(that's all of us)

are to derive the true Christian spirit.”

A quote from Annie Dillard:

“On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions.

Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke?

Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets.

Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.

For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”

So, for the next few weeks we’re going to be exploring this feeding story.

We heard the first version of the story in our reading about Elisha.

Then it is told six times in the four Gospels.

It is a story that captures something essential

-- about Christianity.

-- about our relationship with one another and with God.

We re-enact it each time we do this ritual we call Mass or Eucharist.

We don’t so much tell the story as we DO the story.

It’s meant to get embedded deeply into our psyches.

In John’s telling of the story of the loaves and fishes,

there are some words that are hints about just where the story is going:

Tiberius -- reminder of Roman occupation/oppression.

People followed him because of the Signs -- pointing to a deeper, larger reality, not called miracles;
"Sick" -- more than anything, they were sick at heart;
Mountain -- place where God meets us;
Sat down -- assumes position of teacher;
Passover -- LIBERATION festival -- no longer slaves to anyone or any thing;
Barley loaves -- food for horses and the poor;
Elisha feeds 100 with 20, Jesus feeds more than 5,000 with five and two fish.

A story about Christiane Brusselmans I found in a magazine:

She was a great catechist who died in 1991.

Among other things, she was called "Mother of Christian initiation channel a grace for the whole Church, hospitality in the flesh."

Her first love was catechizing children and families.

One day when she was about to leave Harlem after teaching there, a child asked her to write her name on a piece of paper.

The child promptly swallowed the paper.

"Now, even if you go away, you'll always be inside me."

Today's second reading says humility, gentleness and patience are the virtues that comprise a worthy Christian lifestyle.

Now when Ephesians would have been written and read,

these virtues were not generally considered virtues of Roman society. Gentleness may have been accepted in some circles,

but humility and patience were considered weaknesses and even vices.

The virtues prized by Romans were courage, justice, temperance and prudence. Within early Christianity, however, humility, gentleness and patience had become well-established virtues.

We would all do well to keep that in mind as we approach the mid-term election. What will our miracles look like in the days and months ahead?