

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year B – Jn 6, 1-5

“Impressed by the signs, a large crowd followed him.” John’s Gospel overflows with symbols, images and signs that whisper, hint, or glimpse at a reality that is so real we cannot always understand, these signs are in order to deepen our awareness and widen our experiences.

Today’s miracle story has characteristics to other miracles in John’s Gospel, like the Wedding at Cana. It shows the unlimited divine abundance of God’s power. At the wedding feast Jesus did not change one, but six stone water jars into wine, which was more than enough, and it was the best wine the people had tasted. In today’s gospel five loaves and two fish where a little boy sacrificed his meal were shared abundantly between 5000 men, which is not even counting the women and children. And all were completely satisfied, and all had their fill.

This miracle prefigures the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist. It is only in John’s Gospel that Jesus directly feeds the crowds. In the other Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke it is the disciples who feeds the crowds. This shows in John’s Gospel, it is Jesus who is the ultimate source of the bread of life, it is Jesus who gives nourishment to the people who are not just physically hungry, but also spiritually hungry as well.

“Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready.” These words must sound familiar, linking them to the last supper, which we also hear in our Eucharistic prayers during mass. “For on the night he was betrayed he himself took bread, and giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples.”

In the Mass shortly you see these keys words take centre stage. The Deacon (me) gives - handing over the bread and wine to the priest. The priest who at this point is in the ‘Person of Christ’ (Persona Christi) takes the bread, gives thanks to God the Father for these gifts, and through the miracle of God, when Heaven and Earth touch, brings us all back in time and place to the memorial of the one and only sacrifice on Calvary, Jesus changing the gifts of Bread and Wine into the gift of himself in the form of His Body and Blood, who then directly distributes to this faithful people.

You may have seen placed on the altar a square piece of cloth which we call a corporal. Its purpose is to catch and collect any fragments of the Eucharist that has fallen away. This corporal is folded carefully at the end of mass making sure no fragments are lost. We get a sense of the importance in the scriptures about carefully picking up the scraps of the loaves and fish in the Gospel and

they were enough to fill 12 baskets full, making sure nothing gets wasted. We also read in the book of Exodus when God gives the Israelites manna from Heaven, and they were instructed only to take enough for that day, and not to keep any left over, as the Lord will provide for their needs.

Every day we see in some way the miracle of God's divine providence, we need to be thankful for all the many blessings and benefits that we have received, which sometimes we take for granted.

Especially through these recent months of isolation and Covid restrictions we have all felt the pain and hunger for our daily sacraments when the Churches were closed. The loss was a dreadful time in Christianity, and we are only slowly getting back to normal with the lifting of restrictions.

May we come to realise how grateful we are to receive the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ today in Holy Communion, we especially keep in our prayers the people who are watching online, and the people still isolating, who are desperately crying out to receive the sacraments of the Church at this time.

We pray for the end of this pandemic, allowing all God's faithful people to safely return once again to church, in order to celebrate the sacred mysteries of the Lord's Body and Blood together, as one Church, and One Body in Christ, as we religiously follow Jesus due to all the many signs and wonders He has done.

Deacon Philip Wrigley.