

## Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B Staff Reflection

### **Gospel:** Jn 6:1-15

Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – or of Tiberias – and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover.

Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted.' So they picked them up, and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given, said, 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

Jerusalem Bible, published and copyright 1966, 1967 and 1968 by Darton Longman and Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Co Inc.

### **Gospel Reflection**

In the readings for Ordinary Time, we take a break from the sequence of readings from the Gospel of Mark for a few weeks and this week's reading begins a diversion into chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. The whole of John 6 is an extended discourse that explores the image of Jesus as the Bread of Life. The chapter and the discourse begin with this week's miraculous feeding of the multitude. As this event occurs in each of the four gospels there is a compelling argument for historical fact or, at the very least, that the metaphoric image of Jesus feeding a crowd was an enduring one in Christian communities.

Jesus is described as testing the disciples, asking them where they might be able to purchase bread for the crowd. Phillip is overwhelmed at the thought of spending a fortune on enough bread for more than 5,000 people. A small boy nearby had a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Jesus took the bread and fish, gave thanks and then had the disciples begin to distribute the food. When everyone had eaten their fill, the disciples collected twelve hampers of leftovers. Some commentators suggest that the twelve baskets represent the twelve tribes of Israel – indicating that the message of Jesus will be enough to feed and sustain the whole of Israel. Having witnessed this miracle the people have a sudden insight into who they think Jesus might be – the promised Messiah come to free them from their Roman oppressors. Wary of the crowd's mistaken understanding of what the Messiah is to be, Jesus literally heads for the hills to avoid being made a political figurehead for the people.

© Greg Sunter, *WholeHearted Enterprises*

#### For reflection / discussion

- In what ways is this gospel story a precursor for the Eucharistic meal?
- What is the effect of the miracle on the crowd?
- Why does Jesus 'head for the hills'?
- In what ways does this gospel challenge our world?