

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

In the feeding of the multitude, Jesus shows us the generosity of God and foretells of His gift of the Eucharist to the Church.

At the heart of the message of the Gospel is that we are now a redeemed human race, and God has raised up all these human customs and desires to a supernatural, holy level. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, everything has become redeemed, and everything is a possible channel for grace, if properly used.

In the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus is recalling the generosity of God at the time of the Hebrew people's wandering in the desert, when the Lord caused manna, bread from heaven, to fall each night for the people. It is not an accident that this Gospel miracle of the feeding takes place, as Matthew tells us, "When evening came". Jesus is also taking care of the physical needs of the people who have followed Him so faithfully into a "lonely place". This phrase, "lonely place", is the same word as "desert" in the Greek original.

It is also interesting that this miracle takes place just after Jesus has heard of the death of John the Baptist. It is almost as if Jesus has turned the occasion into a mourning feast for His great herald, cousin and friend.

We can also notice that Jesus first tells His disciples to feed the crowd themselves: He is making them co-workers in His own ministry, and prefiguring the ministerial priesthood He founded on Holy Thursday. The twelve baskets of scraps remaining also symbolize the fullness of the new people Jesus is calling together, recalling God's calling of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus is preparing His disciples for the even greater self-giving He will carry out on the cross, and the memorial, sacrificial, meal, which we call the Eucharist. If Jesus, by his divine power, can multiply the loaves and fishes, how much greater is the generosity where He



gives Himself continually in the Mass? He feeds us not with earthly food, but with His very self, body and blood, soul and divinity. But the story does not end there, of course. By sharing in the Eucharistic banquet we are already participating not only in Christ's death, but also in Christ's resurrection, and therefore our own as well. All the sacraments are participations in the death and resurrection of Christ, but especially baptism and the Eucharist.

This great Eucharistic generosity of God not only prepares us for eternal life, but has consequences for us now. If God is so generous with us, ought we not to be generous with others? One of the great challenges always facing us is that the earth's resources should be shared justly among all, especially those most in need. This is something we can all work on at a personal, collective and global level. When we contribute to making a more just and equitable world, we ourselves are becoming Christ's co-workers in building up the kingdom.

So food, death and religion are profoundly linked, but utterly transformed in the light of the Gospel and the risen Jesus. Jesus still feeds us in the wilderness which this world can be, but we can always bear in mind that our home is the promised land of eternal life with the Blessed Trinity and all the saints and angels.

