

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



This Sunday we begin hearing from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, an important segment of scripture that begins to inform our understanding of the Eucharist. Over the next six weeks, we will hear the bread of life discourse and explore the words of Jesus while overlapping our experience in recovery. The chapter begins with a story told in all four gospel accounts—the feeding of five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish.

If we read John 6 through the lens of the Catholic Mass, we can find a number of spiritual principles that also apply to our journey through addiction recovery. First, we continue to find a magnetic attraction that brings people to Jesus. This same force remains with us today as we are drawn to encounter God through the Eucharistic celebration and as we seek healing for the addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments that darken our lives.

We do not need to bring much to the table as Christ provides in abundance with the little that we have. This week's Gospel story begins with Jesus sitting down (a posture used for teaching during the time) with his disciples as large crowds began to approach. It is noted that Passover is near, a Jewish tradition that remembered the saving grace of a sacrificed lamb. Next, questions surface as to how the crowds will be fed:

*One of his disciples,
Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and
two fish;
but what good are these for so many?"
Jesus said, "Have the people recline."
Now there was a great deal of grass in that place.
So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.
Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,
and distributed them to those who were reclining,
and also as much of the fish as they wanted.*

This same movement takes place in *persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ") when we come together to celebrate Mass. Jesus teaches us through the Word of God and informs us with a homily. We pray together then remember our Paschal Lamb, Jesus Christ, who earned our freedom and salvation through death on a cross.

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As Jesus instructed, the priest takes bread, breaks it, gives thanks, and distributes it among many in order to feed our spiritual hunger. As Catholics, this is our Eucharistic rhythm. The food that Christ offers is lasting and remains, providing an abundance to share with others. The Gospel continues:

*When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples,
"Gather the fragments left over,
so that nothing will be wasted."
So they collected them,
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments
from the five barley loaves
that had been more than they could eat.*

How often have we sought fulfillment and satisfaction in things not of Christ? It may last for a moment, but in many cases spirals into a false idol. The Body of Christ—present in the Eucharist and united in fellowship with those in communion with Jesus—heals us and is a pillar of our recovery and spiritual formation.

- How does your experience in recovery inform the way you worship God when you go to Mass?
 - Are there prayers, meditations, or remembrances that guide your encounter with Christ during Mass?

- Describe a time when God provided for you despite your doubt or lack of hope.

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

Gospel: John 6:1-15