

Fr James' homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021



First Reading: Second Book of the Kings 4:42-44
Second Reading: Letter of the Ephesians 4: 1-6
Gospel: John 6:1-15

Where has St Mark's Gospel gone? For the next three weeks our Sunday Gospels are taken from St John, and we pause the reading of St Mark for a while. In this time we read St John chapter 6, and this is a profound reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist, of Mass, starting with St John's account of the multiplication of the loaves. This scene appears in all four Gospels, and is clearly seen as a most powerful and important part of Jesus' ministry. (Also, this Summer reflection on the Eucharist is very timely for us in emerging from the shadow of Covid and rediscovering our participation in worship.)

For St John, the scene of the multiplication of loaves is also very symbolic, pointing to the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice and symbolic of what happens at Mass, the Mass we participate in today and in which St John himself participated from the Last Supper onwards.

First we hear familiar things. Jesus climbs the hillside, symbolic as we know of the meeting of God and Mankind. Let us reflect on how our Mass is also a meeting on the mountainside, a privileged encounter with our God, a communing with the divine.

Jesus then speaks to them. He sits down, a symbol of authority and they listen to him. In the same way we should truly open our hearts to the scriptures at Sunday Mass, listening to them; maybe reading them in advance so that the Holy Spirit can truly get to work on us.

St John tells us that it is near Passover. This hardly needs a comment from a preacher. This is the time that the lamb of sacrifice was prepared in the Temple, and Jesus of course is that lamb. It is St John who, earlier in his gospel, shows us John the Baptist pointing to Jesus and declaring "Behold the Lamb of God..." At every Mass we come to that same sacrifice. Jesus does not give himself over and over again, but once, in a way that is made new for us each time.

The focus, of course, of the Gospel is on the loaves of bread. Christ calls for contributions, of bread from our own resources. He calls us to give who we are, so that he can feed us from his richness and make us so much more. That offering is a reminder, as Mass itself is, that we are not the centre of the universe, and in knowing this God transfigures what we offer him into the food of eternal life.

St John is careful to show us that Jesus gives thanks for these gifts to his Father. So do we, and it is the great privilege of the ordained priest to speak those words for everyone. One of the reasons the priest wears special vestments to say Mass is as it were to cover up his individuality as he stands in the place of Christ and says the words Christ gave to us.

And last, we read that they gathered up the fragments. So too we take the Blessed Sacrament and gather it into the Tabernacle, so that the gift of Jesus is there for all, and to go out to those in need. So begins our three weeks of meditation on the meaning of the Holy Eucharist and our participation in these holy mysteries. The mystery of Christ is limitless - that is one of the themes of the Gospel of St John. What Christ gives will fill the soul at the deepest level, as long as we give him what he asks, which is exactly what and who we are.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday.

Next week we return to the normal schedule of Sunday Masses in the parish. Soon it will be time to end this series of online homilies, perhaps. We all hope for that time when we can comfortably listen to God's word together in church.