

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

2 Kings 4:42-44

Second Kings includes the stories of Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of all time, and his disciple, Elisha, who became his successor. This brief episode in the life of Elisha is chosen for today's first reading because it is the forerunner of the feeding of the crowd in today's gospel.¹ The time of our reading today is 850 give or take 10 years B.C. Elisha was called by the prophet Elijah and has received from him his mantle and a double portion of his prophetic spirit (the double portion is the inheritance of the firstborn son, an indication that although not related by blood, Elisha was Elijah's spiritual son.¹⁰

42A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, First fruits were loaves milled from grain of the recent harvest and were to be given to the Lord. The man offers it to Elisha because he is a prophet of the Lord.² **and fresh grain in the ear.** Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat." We are told in verse 38 that there was a famine in the land. Because food was scarce, Elisha wants to share it.² He here directs that an obviously insufficient amount of food be set before a large number of people.¹¹

43But his servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" Verses 38 to 41 deal with another miracle associated with feeding the "sons of the prophets." These hundred people were probably members of the groups of prophets that Elisha belonged to when he was living with Elijah.² Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat." For thus says the Lord, This is the common formula for a PREDICTION of the work of God.³ "They shall eat and there shall be some left over." This brief episode in the life of Elisha is obviously chosen for today's first reading because it is the forerunner of the feeding of the crowd in today's gospel.¹ God provides for his people so much so that there is even some left over for when they get hungry again or for others who might come by who are hungry.¹⁵

44And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the Lord had said.

Ephesians 4:1-6

Paul was in prison at the time of this writing and that adds urgency to his call to lead a worthy life. In the first three chapters of this book Paul writes about the standards of Christian belief and with this selection he starts the second half which shows that these standards of belief are inseparable from the standards of Christian behavior.⁴

Brothers and sisters:

1I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, Enormous consequences flow from the fact of being called to form part of the Church through Baptism. We are therefore called to holiness!⁵ Paul's message was written in prison, and today he speaks to all of us who are in some ways locked up in different kinds of prisons. He tells us that no matter where we are or where we go, we go as Christ's representative.¹⁶

2with all humility The word "humility" is a word which was not a virtue until the Christian faith coined and set it in the forefront of the Christian virtues. St. Bernard said that it is by humility that man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness. It depends on honesty!⁷ **and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love,** These are various aspects of charity which "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14) and is the mark of the true disciple of Christ (John 13:35).

3striving Paul is telling us that this unity does not just happen; we all have to work at it.¹⁶ **to preserve the unity of the spirit** This union is displayed in the oneness of their faith (creed), life (code), and sacramental worship.⁴ **through the bond of peace:** This unity is MAINTAINED by “the bond of peace.”⁵ Union of hearts, affections and intentions is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit in souls, and it makes for effectiveness and strength in ministry. As St. Jose Escriva puts it, “One strand of wire entwined with another, many woven tightly together, form that cable strong enough to lift huge weights.”⁵

4one body We are not just members of the same club or association, we are actually members of the same *organism!* The one Body is the visible organism of the Church, the body of Christ.¹⁷ and *one Spirit,* There is only one Holy Spirit who brings about and maintains the unity of Christ’s mystical body, the Church.⁵ **as you were also called to the one hope of your call;** Through the centuries, in so many languages, cultures, peoples, and nations, the Church has constantly confessed this one faith, received from the one Lord, transmitted by one Baptism, and grounded in the conviction that all people have only one God and Father.⁶ (CCC172)

5one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. In praying “our” Father, each of the baptized is praying in this communion of God and men.⁶ (CCC 2790) In Christ and in the Church there is no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex, for ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Col.3:11; Gal. 3:28) Paul reminds us of the foundations of our unity by recalling the seven “*ones*” in this text.¹ Jesus founded only one Church, today there are over 20,000 Protestant denominations which disagree, among other things, on what the one faith is and when the one baptism should be administered and how; resulting in many bodies.¹⁰

John 6:1-15

The multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle, besides the Resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels. Today’s reading is taken from John, rather than from Mark. John’s account of the feeding of the multitude parallels Mark’s but then launches into a long section known as the “bread of life discourse” which has since ancient times been considered by most scholars a discourse on the Eucharist.¹⁴

1Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. This is also known as the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret.⁸

2A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Here St. John notes in a passing manner Jesus’ miracles. The miracles are not recounted in John but appear in the synoptics. John’s gospel relates only seven miracles. The crowd has been attracted by these miracles — this is not necessarily a sign of faith or a growing of that faith; it could be just curiosity. A faith based merely on miracles without a recognition of the nature of the one performing them would be unstable/transitory.¹⁰

3Jesus went up on the mountain, This signifies that some important theological event is about to happen. Tradition associates this mountain with the northwest shore of the lake and a hill called “the Mount of the Beatitudes,” which was thought of as a Christian Sinai.¹² **and there he sat down with his disciples.** Jesus, like the rabbis, usually sat down to teach.¹²

4The Jewish feast of Passover was near. Three times this feast is mentioned in John. It was celebrated annually in Jerusalem to commemorate Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Central to the feast is a liturgical meal called a seder, in which the story of the Exodus is retold,

psalms are sung, and a lamb is eaten with unleavened bread and other condiments. The evangelist mentions this upcoming feast to hint that Jesus will give new and greater meaning to the Passover. He is the true “Lamb of God” whose redeeming work will accomplish a new deliverance from the slavery of sin in a sacramental and liturgical meal. The significance of Passover, here placed in the background of John 6, will move to the foreground when Jesus transforms this feast into the memorial meal of the New Covenant at the Last Supper.⁸

5When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, If this scene takes place in Bethsaida, as it does in Luke, a question to Philip is logical since he was from Bethsaida.¹² “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” There are a number of similarities between this and our first reading from 2 Kings and also Numbers 11:13 where Moses asked Yahweh “Where am I to get meat to give all these people?”¹²

6He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Jesus was sensitive to people’s material and spiritual needs. In this passage he takes the initiative to satisfy the hunger of the crowd of people who have been following him. He is also teaching his disciples to trust in him whenever they meet up with difficulties and to use whatever resources they have, even if they are plainly inadequate.⁹

7Philip answered him, “Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.” Philip looked at what could not be done and Jesus looked at what could be done.¹⁶

8One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,

9“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves The food of the poor. Three loaves were looked on as a meal for one person.¹² In the early Church barley bread was used for the Eucharist, which is a possible link of this miracle to the Eucharist.¹⁴ This detail recalls the similar miracle of Elisha, who multiplied 20 loaves of barley for 100 men with some left over. The miracle of Jesus is comparatively greater: he begins with fewer loaves⁵ and multiplies them for a larger crowd (5000) and likewise has bread left over. Allegorically, St. Bede suggests that the five loaves are the five books of the Torah, the two fish are the Prophets and Psalms, and the young boy is the Jewish people. When Jesus receives these OT Scriptures from the Jews, he breaks open their deeper spiritual meanings to refresh the multitudes.⁸ Consider the woman who baked the bread as a part of her routine housework, never guessing that they would feed 5000 people and be remembered for 2000 years! **and two fish;** These fishes were probably no bigger than sardines and were pickled to keep them from spoiling. There was no other way to transport the fish and keep them in an eatable condition.¹⁶ **but what good are these for so many?”**

10Jesus said, “Have the people recline.” Slaves stood when they ate. Only free people ate while reclining. Christ’s multiplication of the loaves reminds us of the manna with which God fed the Chosen People AFTER THEIR RELEASE FROM BONDAGE in Egypt.¹³ **Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.** In all the accounts of the multiplications, only the men are counted.¹²

11Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, John uses a Greek word for “thanks” from which our English word “Eucharist” is derived. The miracle of the loaves thus foreshadows the institution of this sacrament at the Last Supper.⁸ **and distributed them to those who were reclining and also as much of the fish as they wanted.** Note that Jesus distributed the food himself, like he will do at the Last Supper, rather than having the Twelve do it. John mentions that this event occurred near Passover and he says that Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them (just as the other writers said that Jesus did at the Last Supper) for this is the story of the Eucharist in the gospel of

John who did not give us an account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.¹ It is interesting to note that a scene of the multiplication was used in 2nd century catacomb art to symbolize the Eucharist.¹²

12When they had had their fill, This reminds us of the messianic banquet of heaven where all will receive their fill.¹¹ he said to his disciples, “Gather the fragments In the Didache, the same word is used for gathering the Eucharistic bread. Also in the Didache the word used for the morsels of bread is the same word used here and in the synoptics.¹⁰ left over, so that nothing will be wasted.” This reminds us of the care taken of the Eucharistic fragments in the early church.¹²

13So they collected them, This is the only miracle in which Jesus allows his disciples to participate¹⁴ and filled twelve wicker baskets Again a Mosaic setting—12 is the number of tribes—there is enough left over for all the Jewish nation.¹⁰ with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. Christ’s instruction to pick up the leftovers also teaches us that material resources are gifts of God and should not be wasted.⁸

14When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This is truly the Prophet, Israel awaited the coming of a prophet in the likeness of Moses.⁸ Deuteronomy 18:18- “And the Lord said (to Moses) I will raise up from them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.” In addition to the similarity of Jesus to the expected Prophet-like-Moses, there is also the connection between the food supplied by Jesus and the manna given by Moses. So, it seems that the purpose of this miracle is not limited to compassion for the hungry people for it is a messianic sign fulfilling the OT promises that in the days to come, God would feed His people with plenty.⁸ The one who is to come into the world.”

15Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, Israel hoped for a militant Messiah to overthrow the Romans and reestablish their national independence in Palestine. Jesus backs away from these aspirations, knowing that his kingdom is heavenly and spiritual.⁸ he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “The Navarre Bible: Joshua—Kings,” (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians,” (5) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (6) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (7) “The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians” by William Barclay, (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” (9) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (10) St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn, (11) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Aelred R. Rosser; (12) “The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According To John I-XII” by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., (13) “Bible Basics” by Steve Kellmeyer, (14) “Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray, (15) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2009” by Mary A. Ehle, (16) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, and (17) “The Sunday Epistles And Gospels” by Monsignor Patrick Boylan.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.