

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - 2 Kings 4:42-44

1st and 2nd Kings are really one book which traces the religious heritage of the chosen people from the death of David (the second king, the first having been Saul) in about 970 B.C., through the division of the kingdom into the northern and southern kingdoms, to the downfall of the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) and the destruction of the Temple (586 B.C.).

In fact, the Hebrew Bible until 1517 contained one book which encompassed what we call 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. The division of Samuel from Kings occurred in the Greek Septuagint (about 200 B.C.) and Jerome's Latin Vulgate (A.D. 392-404) followed this form. The Septuagint and Vulgate called what we now know as 1st & 2nd Samuel "1st & 2nd Kings" and what we now know as 1st & 2nd Kings "3rd & 4th Kings". Some older Catholic Bibles (such as the *Douay-Rheims*) reflect these 1st through 4th Kings headings.

The time of our reading today is 850 give or take ten years B.C.; during the time of Elisha the prophet. Elisha (means "God has saved") was called by the prophet Elijah (means "my God is Yahweh") 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). Elijah was assumed into heaven in 2 Kings 2:11. Today's reading is one of the miracles of Elisha, the multiplication of loaves.

42 A man came from Baal-shalishah

Baal means lord or owner/master. Shalishah is of unknown meaning. It is located in Samaria. Baal worship appeared early in Israel. To worship the baal is to "serve" him, to "walk after" him, or to "commit fornication after" him. The symbol of the baal was an upright stone pillar of uncertain character (2 Kings 3:2), most probably a phallic symbol. That he was a dispenser of fertility is clearly indicated in Hosea 2:2-13 (Hosea 2:4-15 in the New American and New Jerusalem bibles with v8-9 located after 2:15 in the New American Bible). This passage also indicates Yahweh was sometimes given the attributes of the Baal and worshiped with the rites of the Baal. As a result, a large number of Israelite names compounded with baal have been found in the records of Samaria – not necessarily indicating baal worship.

bringing the man of God twenty barely loaves made from the first fruits, and fresh grain in the ear.

Bread milled from the grain of the recent harvest. The gift indicates the esteem in which Elisha was held as the first fruits were sacred to Yahweh.

“Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said. ⁴³ But his servant objected, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha insisted. “For thus says the LORD,

The common formula for the prediction in a prediction-fulfillment story. (Note the contrast between the servant’s doubts and the prophet’s calm self-assurance.)

‘They shall eat and there shall be some left over.’” ⁴⁴ And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

The common formula for the fulfillment in a prediction-fulfillment story

2nd Reading - Ephesians 4:1-6

We now skip over Chapter 3 of Ephesians and begin the moral section; the Book of Ephesians having been divided by the scripture scholars into two sections: Dogmatic and Moral. Our reading today is the first part of Paul’s call to unity which encompasses verses 1 through 16.

^{4:1} I, then, a prisoner for the Lord,

This was written while St. Paul was held prisoner in Rome. It is one of his “captivity epistles.”

urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,

A Christian’s conduct should be consistent with the calling he has received from God (Colossians 1:10, Philippians 1:27).

² with all humility and gentleness,

In Greek lists, humility is not a virtue. The word, in Greek carries the connotation of mean-spiritedness. Christ, however, by His example raised self-effacing service to others to the dignity of a virtue.

with patience,

Being slow to retaliate. Similar passages are Colossians 3:12, 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, Galatians 5:22-23. What we have here is a litany of “shoulds” – what you should do to show

you are a Christian. All the virtues Paul lists are different aspects of charity which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14) and is the mark of the true disciple in Christ (John 13:35). Charity originates not in man, but in God. Charity is basic to the building up of a peaceful human society. The peace which unites Christians is the peace which Christ brings through the Spirit.

bearing with one another through love,³ striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:

The Spirit is the single inner source of Christian life and continually moves the members toward peace and harmony.

⁴ one body

One external visible community (the Church)

“What is this one body? They are the faithful throughout the world – in the present, in the past and in the future. ... The body does exist apart from its enlivening spirit, else it would not be a body. It is a common human metaphor to say of things that are united and have coherence that they are one body. So we too take the term ‘body’ as an expression of unity” [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 392-397), *Homilies On The Epistle To The Ephesians*, 10,4,4].

and one Spirit,

A single inner source

as you were also called to the one hope of your call;

The Spirit is the pledge of the future unified community (Ephesians 1:14).

⁵ one Lord,

Christians pledge obedience to one master in their baptismal profession of faith (Romans 10:9). Jesus is the head of the Mystical Body (the Church).

one faith,

One fixed body of doctrine (1 Timothy 3:9; 6:20-21). Held in community (see Matthew 18:17).

one baptism;

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 St. Paul uses the fact that Christians have been plunged into one Christ by baptism as a proof that there can be no divisions in the community by adherence

to human leaders (see also [Galatians 3:27-29](#)).

“The Lord is one and God is one, because the dominion of the Father and of the Son is one divinity. Moreover the faith too is said to be one, because we believe likewise in Father and in Son and in Holy Spirit. And there is one Baptism, for it is in one and the same way that we are baptized in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. And we are dipped three times so that the one Sacrament of the Trinity may be made apparent. And we are not baptized in the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but in one name, which one name we know to be God” [Saint Jerome (A.D. 436), *Commentaries On The Epistle To The Ephesians*, 2,4,5,6-7].

⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

They are bonded together as brothers, children of one father. We are all part of one holy family covenant (Ephesians 3:14). What we have just heard following the litany of “shoulds” is a litany of “ones”. Jesus founded only one Church; today there are over 31,000 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.

Gospel - John 6:1-15

At this point in the liturgical calendar we temporarily divert our attention from the Gospel of Mark (the Gospel for this cycle) to the Gospel of John. The gospel readings for this week and the next four weeks will be from John. This week we hear the account of the feeding of the five thousand.

^{6:1} After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (of Tiberias). ² A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick.

Here Saint 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.

³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

Only Matthew (in recounting the feeding of the 4000, a later feeding) places a multiplication miracle on a mountainside. The mountain evokes memory of Mount Sinai where Moses received the commandments. (In Matthew 5:1 the Beatitudes are given on a mountain and in Mark 3:13 the Twelve are appointed on a mountain)

⁴ The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

We are now over halfway through Jesus' public ministry and one year from his passion, death and resurrection. There are 3 Passovers mentioned in Holy Scripture, all appear in John's gospel:

- 1) John 2:13-23 - The cleansing of the temple immediately after the marriage feast of Cana.
- 2) John 6:4 - The multiplication of the loaves (today's reading).
- 3) John 11:55 - Jesus' passion.

The Passover is important to John in the development of the background and meaning of the Eucharist which we will hear unfold over the next four weeks.

⁵ When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"

Just like the mountain is a reference back to Moses, so is this test. Numbers 11:13-15 is where Moses is concerned with the feeding of his people. Recall that the disciples had been sent out with no food, no money (Mark 6:8 – the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time in this cycle; 2 weeks ago).

⁶ He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food

Two hundred days' wages would be two hundred denarii (Mark 6:37 account of the feeding of the 5,000). This would be 200 pieces of silver; the denarius being the smallest silver coin, smaller denominations being of copper.

would not be enough for each of them to have a little (bit)."

Philip's answer is similar to Moses' observation in Numbers 11:22.

⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter,

Andrew was the disciple who brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:41). We get a brief glimpse into Andrew's personality. Andrew was the one consulted by Philip when the Greeks (Gentiles) wanted to see Jesus (John 12:20-22).

said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"

Barley is the ordinary food of the poor. Five could be a reference to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, the law (if this pertains to the Mosaic setting).

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that

place.

It was springtime (near Passover, the end of the grain harvest).

So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining,

Almost the same words used in the synoptics to describe the institution of the Eucharist (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Although John doesn't mention breaking the bread, the synoptics do (Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:40; Luke 9:16). The Greek word *eucharisteo*, translated here as "gave thanks" denotes a 2-way action: God-ward in praising God (giving thanks) and an earth-ward in receiving God's blessing. The synoptics have the disciples distributing the food. In view of the size of the crowds, this seems plausible – John's bypassing this detail is a reminder of the Last Supper where Jesus did the distributing.

and also as much of the fish as they wanted. ¹² When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted."

In the Didache (9:4) the same word is used for gathering the Eucharistic bread, a symbol of the gathering of the Church. Also in the Didache the word used for the morsels of bread is the same word used here and in the synoptics.

¹³ So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat.

Again a Mosaic setting – 12 is the number of tribes – there is enough left over for all the Jewish nation.

¹⁴ When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet,

The people see (correctly) in this miracle that Jesus is the prophet like Moses come to found the new Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15). It was also a Jewish belief that the prophet Elijah would return to earth to take a part in the establishment of God's kingdom (Malachi 3:23, Sirach 48:4-12). Jesus stated (Matthew 11:14; 17:12) that John the Baptist has fulfilled this mission. The people have made this statement because of the signs Jesus has performed, not because of the depth of their understanding.

the one who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain

He simply goes away to avoid being proclaimed what He is not. In His dialog with Pilate (John 18:36) He explains that His kingdom is not of this world. Anything which would alter His mission as a servant of God is a temptation and is avoided.

alone.

It is not unlikely that the Apostles shared the enthusiasm of the people. Moses went up the mountain alone. Jesus' mission is complete salvation through transforming, peacemaking, pardoning, and reconciling love.

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