

February 4: John 6

Vs. 1-21, A large crowd (5000 people) continues to follow Jesus because of the signs they saw him doing for the sick. Jesus asks Philip a trick question, for he already knew what he would do. The enormous sum of money required to buy food for 5000 people highlights the enormity of the sign that Jesus would perform in providing for them. Just like the water into wine produced abundance for the people as a sign of God's abundant grace, so too the feeding of the crowd with 12 baskets of leftovers is a sign of God's abundant provision and grace. Andrew finds a boy with 5 barley loaves (the bread of the poor) and 2 fish, probably his own lunch. These are the resources they have available, but how can these finite resources possibly stretch to meet the needs of all? Answer: placing them in God's hands. When those loaves and fish are placed in God's hands for God's use, God provides for the needs of all the people present. Jesus offers thanks for the food- reminiscent of the Eucharist. And Jesus himself feeds all the people until they are satisfied. The people were amazed by this sign and believed that Jesus was the Messiah –so much so that they were about to force him to become their king (the role they expected the Messiah to take on). Jesus withdrew by himself. The disciples waited and waited and ended up leaving without him! Jesus came walking on the water toward them –which was terrifying, but also which reinforced their own belief in him. "It is I" is another way of saying "I AM" aka God's own personal name.

Vs. 22-40, The crowd comes looking for Jesus because their physical needs were met. Now, Jesus takes his providence for them one step further in connecting their physical food to that which will fulfill them spiritually- vs. 27, work for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. The work of God is to believe in Christ – we are saved by faith, not by works. The irony is that these people just saw Jesus feed 5000 from 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, and they still ask him for a sign like Moses gave to the people in the wilderness (the manna). Jesus reminds the people that those who ate the manna eventually died, but that God is giving to them the true bread from heaven (Jesus himself), and those who eat that bread will never die, but will have eternal life. This is foundational scripture to our understanding of the Eucharist, which the catechism says gives us "forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation." Vs. 35, "I am the bread of life" is the first of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel. These statements are brief summaries of/metaphors for the themes Jesus is teaching throughout the gospel. Vs. 39, Jesus reminds us that the will of God is that all people should be gathered into Jesus, and that Jesus should raise them all up on the last day. Jesus promises to raise up all who see and believe in him.

Vs. 41-71, One obstacle Jesus faced was his reputation as "Mary and Joseph's boy." They were expecting the Messiah to come from obscurity, and Jesus himself said that he had "come down from heaven" when those arguing with him had seen him grow up in their own town. Vs. 44, faith is a gift from God, not a work that we will into existence. Creating faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, drawing people to God. Eternal life is God's pure gift of grace to us, all we need do is claim it. Vs. 51, Jesus takes his metaphor of bread of life a step too far for most of those who were listening to him, evoking cannibalistic imagery: "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." And, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day." Of course, we know that Jesus is speaking of his flesh which will die

on the cross to give life to the world. And we know that as we receive him in Holy Eucharist, we receive his body and blood “in, with, and under” the bread and wine through the mystery of God’s grace, but to the Jewish audience listening to him these statements were the height of sacrilege. One of the foundational Jewish dietary laws was that Jews were forbidden from eating anything which still had blood in it (only allowed to eat their meat well done), for blood was considered to contain a creature’s life force, and therefore it was sacred to God. Worse yet, he said these things while teaching in a synagogue! Vs. 63, Jesus tries to explain that he’s not talking about cannibalism but about spiritual matters, but the people don’t understand. Because of this grotesque teaching many of those who had believed in him and had followed him turn away from him. Only the 12 are left, and Jesus asks them if they also wish to leave him. Peter now confesses that they believe that Jesus is the Messiah and will continue to follow him. His words, though confusing at times, are indeed the words of eternal life.