

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** 17<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (B)  
2 Kings 4: 42-44 Psalm 145 Ephesians 4: 1-6 John 6: 1-15  
Jude Siciliano, OP

PRENOTE:

See the our webpage for an article entitled, “Health Care for All,” by Brenda Walsh, OP. (Go to <https://PreacherExchange.com> and click on “Justice Preaching.”

Can you identify with the people in today’s gospel and guess the questions they must have had after the miracle of the feeding? They were hungry for food, of course, but also for relief from their problems and hard lives. The people were under still-one- more tyrant – Rome. John refers to the Passover to remind us of another time when the people were in slavery – in Egypt. God delivered them then through the prophet Moses, God fed them in the desert and took them to freedom. Moses promised God would send them another prophet (Deuteronomy 18:50), a special anointed one.

The crowd that followed Jesus that day needed and longed for the fulfillment of Moses’ promise. They weren’t merely waiting for another prophet, but “the Prophet.” (It’s capitalized in my Lectionary, “Prophet,” to emphasize the uniqueness of this One). So, the people wondered, could Jesus be this promised One who would take them to the final banquet, the eschatological moment, when God would overcome all evil and invite them to rest, eat and celebrate?

John is telling his story in a way that would hint to the reader that God is fulfilling the promise made through Moses. Notice the links in the story to the Moses narrative. It’s Passover time; Jesus, like Moses, goes up to a mountain; he provides bread to those who are following him. Like Elisha, in the first reading, Jesus distributes barley bread, the food of the poor, to the people. The gospel hints that it is the poor who need our attention too, if we are followers of Jesus.

But also notice how John has linked the miracle to the Eucharist, by using liturgical language familiar to our Christian gatherings. Jesus “took the loaves, gave thanks,” and distributes them to those gathered. After all have been fed, Jesus instructs his disciples to “gather” the leftover bread fragments. In the original language, the word for the bread fragments is the same used to describe the eucharistic bread fragments. (In the following weeks John will develop further the

eucharistic themes in Chapter 6.)

There is another type of “gathering” occurring at the scene of the multiplication and also here at our worship. Like the crowd, we come from diverse places and backgrounds. In one way or another, we have different hungers and we are scattered – we have personal fragmentation caused by sin, poor choices, uncertainty and ignorance. In addition, no matter where our parish is located, whether we are a rich or poor parish, uniform or blended, we are a scattered community of worshipers. We have diverse languages, economics, genders, political affiliations, sexual orientation, education, races, marital status, etc. Who could possibly pull us all in and form us into a community – who, but Christ, can feed and “gather” us? Ephesians reminds us today that unity, including Christian unity, is not an automatic. We must work for it in humility and openness, with patience and love. We are the “fragments” gathered together today to hear God’s Word and receive the Eucharist which will change our hearts and enables us to work for that unity.

Unlike many of us, Jesus wasn’t fussy about the people with whom ate. If we want to celebrate an event, a birthday or holiday, we go out of our way to prepare a lovely meal. We might serve some family favorites, traditional foods, handed on to us by our parents or grandparents. We say, “My mother always made this for our birthdays, here try some.” There’s nothing wrong with wanting to celebrate with family and friends. That’s just what Jesus is doing today. He is celebrating a special occasion with people who aren’t part of his blood family. But all ate the same food, all were treated as equals and all became, or could become, part of the same family – Jesus’ family. Which is what is offered to us today when we eat and drink the food God has provided for us on this mountain.

Back to our opening question: can you identify with the people Jesus fed? Can you feel their anticipation that, in Jesus, the time of fulfillment had arrived? What wouldn’t we give now for Christ to come and write the last line of history and close the book – no more war, hunger, civil strife, violence and injustice? Don’t we yearn for that time to come when we can breathe a sigh of relief and say together, “Finally it’s done! God has triumphed and wiped away all tears!”

The multiplication story is in all four gospels, which is a clear indication of how important the first generation of Christians considered it. Each evangelist narrates the story in a different way. What really happened that day? That’s not the question

the writers want to address. Instead, they want us to ask, “What does it mean for us today?” So, we give John a fair hearing and pay attention to how he tells the story. I like the feel of the story as I read it. It is meditative, rich in images that prompt reflection. It’s a fuller story than the accounts in the synoptic gospels, with a lot of references to the Hebrew Scriptures. Those familiar with the Hebrew texts will have still more material for meditation.

Can you sense who Jesus is in the story? John’s narrative is reflective, and Jesus is very much in charge of this dinner in that out-of-the-way place. Jesus is deliberate and measured in the story; he directs the scene. Even though he asks Philip, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” – John is quick to tell us that Jesus already knew what he was going to do. In the synoptic gospels the disciples distribute the bread; but here John tells us, Jesus did. Yes, Jesus is our host, he is the one we can trust. He knows our hungers and will feed us at each stage of our journey, until at last, we arrive safely home.

### **FAITH BOOK**

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

#### **From today’s Gospel reading:**

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.

#### **Reflection:**

After Jesus multiplies the food, he himself distributes it. He is our host, the one whom we can trust to feed our hungers. He will be with us to nourish us at each stage of life’s journey until, at last, we arrive safely home for the everlasting banquet with him and each other.

#### **So, we ask ourselves:**

- What hungers are we experiencing today as we gather around the Eucharistic table?
- Who are the hungry we are called by Christ to feed? Where? How?

### **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

**“When they had eaten, there was some left over,  
as the Lord had said”(2 Kings 4:44)**

***“Gather the fragments left over...that had been more than they could eat” (John 6:1-15)***

Most of us have so many leftovers in our lives. We likely have leftover time in our week, leftover space in our homes, leftover knowledge, leftover food in the freezer or fridge and maybe even leftover money that we just might need someday. It's even possible that we have more than enough compassion and love to give some of our very selves away. In today's first reading and in the Gospel, we learn what God can do with leftovers that are offered for sharing. The world's needs for food, for healthcare, for education, for housing and for love could be easily met with our leftovers, if they were offered by us generously and blest by God's Spirit and grace.

“No man or woman of good will should stand as an idle witness to the complex social problems of our day. Equally deserving of our attention and care is the private suffering of countless children, women, and men who do not have enough food to eat; who are deprived of adequate education, housing, or employment; or who suffer the trauma of abuse or neglect.”

“Social ministry is an expression of the Gospel and of the prophetic, servant ministry of Jesus Christ; as such, it is a fundamental element of the mission of the Church.”

“The charitable and justice-oriented activities of the Church are integral to the collective responsibility of all citizens to build the common good of our nation and of the entire human family.” (*US Catholic Bishops In All Things Charity*).

### **Did you know?**

- Our parish community here at Sacred Heart offers many ways to share our “leftover” time, resources and love.
- Ministries addressing poverty, homelessness, hunger, incarceration, HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies, immigration, global solidarity and many other needs would be blessed by your presence and participation.

### **What can I do?**

- Check the bulletin for contact information. Call and offer yourself and your “leftovers” (or your first fruits) to one of our outreach ministries. Your gifts will be multiplied and “distributed” to those in need, and you will be blest for your generosity.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, *"People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."* If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- John H. Fleming                      #0571535    (On death row since 4/8/97)
- Rowland Hedgepath                #0176701    (7/3/97)
- Jamey Cheek                        #0538027    (7/3/97)

---Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

"Blessings on your preaching",

Jude Siciliano, OP

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