

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST -C-**

Genesis 14: 18-20 Psalm 110: 1-4 I Corinthians 11: 23-26 Luke 9: 11b-17

*By: Jude Siciliano, OP*

Dear Preachers:

Today's gospel seems to be a response to a question. Just prior (9:7-9) we are told that Herod, the tetrarch, had been hearing about Jesus and was "perplexed." Who could Jesus be? Because of Jesus' preaching and miracles speculation abounded: perhaps John the Baptist had been raised from the dead; or Elijah had appeared; or, "one of the prophets of old has arisen." Herod dismisses these possibilities and persists with his question, "Who is this man about whom I hear all these reports?" Luke ends this preceding passage by commenting that Herod "was very curious to see him."

A response to the merely curious, no matter how important or high ranking they be, is not why Luke has written his gospel. Rather, he says in the opening lines of the gospel, he has compiled, "a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in our midst" (1:1). He tells us he is writing to help believers see, "how reliable the instruction was that you received." No, Luke is not writing for Herod, or the merely curious. He is writing for Christians, to help us be more firmly grounded in our faith. However, Herod's question about Jesus' identity is a good introduction to today's account of the feeding of the 5,000. The details of the feeding might not have satisfied Herod; but for us listening with the ears of faith, Luke gives further insight into Jesus' identity and significance for us.

The twelve apostles have just returned from their preaching and healing mission (9:10) and Jesus takes them away to Bethsaida where they can be alone and the apostles can share their experiences with Jesus and maybe get some helpful feedback and instruction from him. But the crowds discover where they are and follow them. Jesus' plans are upset, but he responds to the crowds. The first thing he does is speak to them about the kingdom of God. Then, seeing that there are sick among them, Jesus heals them. Those who have come looking for Jesus are the poor and marginalized and Jesus speaks to them about God's welcome and embrace. By acknowledging and tending to them he personifies God's reign and is the sign to them that they are outsiders no longer.

Today's story falls in a very busy section of the gospel, chapter 9. Jesus and his disciples are on mission and soon (9:51) he will begin the deliberate journey to Jerusalem. Meals play an important part in this gospel, and they differ; the meals have various settings and participants. When Jesus eats with the "righteous" Pharisees they question his authority and authenticity. But in today's passage Jesus has a different kind of meal, this time with a vast crowd, whom the religious of his day considered the great unwashed and unworthy.

In Luke's gospel Jesus is continually reaching out to those the more devout would reject or overlook. The account of the feeding contains the essential elements of Jesus' ministry found throughout Luke's gospel: the poor are welcomed, healed and fed; diverse people are united ("in groups of about fifty"); prayer is offered, and the disciples are taught to serve. At this point we might respond to Herod's preceding inquiry about Jesus' identity. Who is this Jesus? Jesus is the one who announces in word and deed the kingdom of life. Those who would not be welcome in Herod's court are embraced by the one who ushers them into God's reign, where they are the honored guests.

Who gets to eat with Jesus? Who are on the invitation list? There is no invitation list, it's an open banquet with the one who is announcing the advent of the kingdom of God. What will this kingdom be like? Our story today suggests it will be a huge gathering of all kinds of people who have been fed and healed by the Lord and served by his disciples. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and "looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." We will hear similar words later in the gospel at the Last Supper. Luke is making a link between the breaking of the bread with the crowds and the Eucharistic bread of the Last Supper. Echoes of the two meals can also be heard when Jesus breaks bread for the disciples on the road to Emmaus (24: 13-35). In Luke's telling, Jesus doesn't distribute the bread and fish himself. He gives that task to his disciples. Those who have been traveling with Jesus heard his teaching and eaten with him, have been receiving nourishment and formation from him. Now they, like us gathered in worship today, must in turn teach, feed and heal others in his name.

So, Herod wants to know who Jesus is. The multiplication is just one in a series of narratives that will help Luke's believing readers form their own response. The gospel doesn't give a formal answer; instead by presenting Jesus' words and deeds,

Luke helps us identify who Jesus is and what meaning he has for our lives. After today's passage another question arises about Jesus' identity. But it isn't Herod who asks. Jesus himself puts the question to his disciples (9: 18-22). It's as if he is saying, "Now that you saw how I fed the crowds, who do you say that I am?." Herod is out of the scene, now the focus is on Jesus' followers and each of us must formulate our response. We know what Peter's answer will be, "The messiah of God" (9:20). It is characteristic of Luke to show how Jesus fulfills the promises God made to the Jewish people. Peter and the others will have to learn more about Jesus' identity and what it means to call Jesus God's messiah.

According to our Corinthians reading, the breaking of the bread at the last Supper and at our Eucharist today, help us "remember" Jesus. We remember that he was rejected and suffered on our behalf, was killed and then raised from the dead. We also remember from today's gospel reading that Jesus is the one who offered God's hospitality to the hungry, ailing and searching. He not only fed them with material food but gave himself to them. Jesus is the shepherd God promised, who would feed, teach and protect God's flock in the wilderness. He also challenged his disciples to see the hungry around them, offer hospitality and feed them in body and spirit. The disciples' first response seems to have been resignation to the people's overwhelming needs. They suggest Jesus send the crowds away. They needed to learn hospitality from Jesus. Jesus, who was not welcomed among his own and would finally be cast out and crucified, offered hospitality in a "deserted place" to the crowds.

We have learned more about who Jesus is. Now we must learn about who we are as his followers. We certainly cannot miss the modern day "crowds" in our world who, in one "deserted place" or another, are looking to be fed. For example, in our own country where we have so much, many have insufficient food, education and protection. In a country of super-abundance there still are people who lack adequate health care and good education. We cannot ignore them or send them away; not if we believe in the gospel and have heard Jesus' directive, "Give them some food yourselves."

To gather in worship today is to be welcomed into our God's wide embrace. We, like the crowds, come searching for nourishment and healing. We are fed the food of God's Word to sustain us and we share the same food, the body and blood of Christ. The feeding of the 5,000 teaches us something about our Eucharist today.

The crowds ate the same food; it was a meal of equality. Some did not get more, while others were fed less. All who were hungry had what they needed—and more. In our meal today, we receive more than enough as we share in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We don't eat and drink in private. Not only are we fed, but we are a community whose eyes are opened by what we see and hear from Jesus. With him we look out at the hungers immediately around us and in our wider world. Jesus sees what we see and says, "Give them some food yourselves." We who have come to identify the Lord in ourselves and in our community know that he will take whatever bread we have to give, bless it and through us multiply it until all are satisfied.

We celebrate the feast of "the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ" today. In Hebrew, the expression "body and blood" did not connote two parts of a person, the body and blood. Rather, it was a way of speaking of the entirety, the life of a person. At the Eucharist we will be hearing, "This is my body...this is my blood." Jesus is giving his whole self to us. He is turning his attention to us the way he did to the hungry and ailing crowds. He may have been seeking rest and privacy for himself and his disciples, but when the needy and searching crowds appeared he fed their bodies and spirits and that's what he does for us today.

If Herod's curiosity were to cause him to inquire further about Jesus' identify he would have to pay attention to what Luke tells us as the gospel progresses. Despite the threat to his own safety, Jesus will continue to give his whole self, body and blood, to those who turn to him for help. He will even continue to reach out to the religious leaders who are hostile to him. Luke is showing that Jesus consistently gives himself for others. "Take and eat...take and drink." He does not turn away from his self offering, even on the cross. Today's feast shines a light on the gospel and helps us see that Jesus' whole life is made present to us at this Eucharist, we who have searched for him because we hunger and thirst for more than life is able to give us.

### **QUOTABLE**

(This is a story I used for a preaching on this feast a couple years ago.)

During World War II, the officers of the Third Reich's secret service forcefully recruited many 12- and 13-year-old boys into the Junior Gestapo. The harshly treated boys were given only inhumane jobs that they were to perform without rest or complaint.

After the war ended, most had lost contact with their families and wandered aimlessly, without food or shelter. As part of an aid program to rebuild postwar Germany, many of these youths were housed in tent cities. There, doctors and nurses worked with them in an attempt to restore their physical, mental and emotional health.

Many of the boys would awaken several times during the night screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea for handling their fears. After serving the boys a hearty meal, he'd tuck them into bed with a piece of bread in their hands that they were told to save until morning. The boys began to sleep soundly after that because, after so many years of hunger and uncertainty as to their next meal, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

----Patricia Datchuck Sanchez, in "Celebration: A Comprehensive Worship Resource," May, 29, 2005.

### **JUSTICE NOTES**

#### **"They all ate and were satisfied."(Luke 9:17)**

The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: "Give us this day our daily bread," obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries. In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end it is necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine. In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find great wisdom to guide Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues."

(*Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007)

Did you know?

-----854 million people across the world are hungry, up from 852 million a year ago.

-----Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes--one child every five seconds.

-----35.1 million people in the US—including 12.4 million children—live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. This represents more than one in ten households in the United States (11.0 percent).

-----The U.S. Conference of Mayors reports that in 2006 requests for emergency

food assistance increased an average of 7 percent. The study also found that 48 percent of those requesting emergency food assistance were members of families with children and that 37 percent of adults requesting such assistance were employed.

What Can I do?

-----Don't take your "daily bread" for granted.

-----Fast for a day to better understand the experience of hunger and to be in solidarity with the hungry of the world.

-----Learn about issues of hunger and how you can make a difference. A great source of information and inspiration is: <http://www.bread.org/>

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

If you want to learn about HUNGER IN THE U.S., the Oakland, Ca. diocese's "Social Justice News" recommends this webpage:

[http://www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/hunger\\_index.html](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html)

### **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

***"It is time to abandon the death penalty -- not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners -- to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person.***

----- ("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to...

- Johnny S. Parker                      #0311966    (On death row since 3/24/97)
- John H. Fleming                      #0571536    (4/8/97)
- Rowland Hedgepath                      #0176701    (7/3/97)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **“FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C.”** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year C–CD” button on the right and follow the instructions.
2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. ([FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org))
3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)
4. “First Impressions” is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like “First Impressions” sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

## **DONATIONS**

If you would like to support this ministry, please go to our webpage to make a secure online donation: <http://preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thank you and “blessings on your preaching”,  
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