

“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:

Someone in a preaching preparation group said that he would preach on the Eucharist this Sunday and find some texts from the readings to back him up. Exactly what we shouldn't be doing! Let the Scriptures form this preaching and see what new insights we get on the Eucharist. One approach would be to start by listing the hungers you perceive around your congregation and the wider world. Then see how the readings address these hungers. (Note the reference below to the website for “Bread for the Word,” and excellent source of information for this preaching.)

This feast was established for the entire Church in 1264. It was intended as a way to honor Christ present in the Eucharist. This was the time when Eucharistic devotions made their appearance---Blessed Sacrament processions, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and expositions of the Sacrament. While these were good devotions, the links that had been expressed previously in the early church between the Eucharistic assembly and the Eucharistic meal, became weakened. Thus, the notion that the Eucharist is the body of Christ—as is the Church--declined in awareness.

Just before today's gospel episode we read that the apostles had returned from their preaching mission and Jesus had wanted time apart with them—but the crowds “found this out and followed him” (9:10-11). Nevertheless, he “received” the crowds; there is a sense of a warm welcome here. Jesus is going to see to all their needs. These were subsistence level people, just a day or two from hunger and even starvation. Nevertheless, the crowds in the story just didn't get “fast food” to fill their bellies, even though they were hungry. First, they heard about God and the announcement of the reign of God from Jesus. Healings followed. But I think the healings don't just end after the opening line, they are there for the people and us in the feeding as well. Notice the time of day, “As sunset approached.” It is getting dark.

One darkness in our world is the multitudes of hungry people. Yet economists tell us that the hungry would have enough to eat if the world's food and goods were more equitably distributed. This was a point made by the “Bread for the World” movement. Their literature is readily available, and they have an office in Washington for a quick call if the preacher feels a need for statistics. Try the webpage listed below for a fast response. Or call a local group that feeds the hungry for information. The gospel story has the word “Distribution” in it and the disciples are

in charge of "distribution". We too need to tend to distribution, i.e., to see how things are being distributed, who is left out when decisions are made locally and on a national level about who gets the "goods" and who does not.

A large crowd is fed and all have "enough." They share a simple meal, all eat, no one gets different or fancier food and thus there is enough for all. Play with the word---"enough." Who gets "More than enough" in our world, who doesn't get "enough"? Suggest calling a local food pantry to find out if they have "enough" food. I know a men's group that collects slightly damaged food from local supermarkets that richer people don't buy, and they take the food to a food pantry for the poor. Another parish has families taking turns going to a shelter to bring and cook meals on a monthly basis. Name some of these efforts in your own congregation that somehow make Jesus' "feeding presence" felt in the community of the hungry.

The disciples wanted to send the crowd away, push the hungry out of sight and so forget their needs. "As sunset approached..." It is dark indeed because of their blindness. Jesus wants the opposite. Initially he tells the people the very good news of the reign and heals them (the first verse). But then the reign's reality is felt, made visible, "enfleshed" when he responds to their hungry. The disciples now are the ones to receive a healing when they "see" how to address the needs of these people. First there are small groups of 50--little communities are formed to make the meal personal, to heal the hungers of our alienation. We are not just an anonymous crowd of "the hungry" any longer. We are a community that shares the bread in a meal of equality. People of higher ranking don't get more than those of lower; we all get more than enough for our hungers. And as disciples, we learn not to distance ourselves from the needs of others, for in small groups, we get to know each other and are better able to feed the hungers of body and spirit of those around us. Our church communities, though larger than the groups of fifty in the story, become ways we can get to know one another and attend to the hungers we discover there.

In the Eucharistic bread and wine today, we are receiving the One who invites us to come close and receive a healing. And we are also receiving the One who asks his disciples, "Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?" Our response may be puzzlement and confusion as we look at the enormity of the problem. But the Eucharist can heal us and open our eyes and minds to how we can feed the hungry and where they can be found in our immediate environment. There is a healing for us too in this story, as our eyes are opened, and this healing comes by way of the food Jesus provides.

Here are some other messages we might develop from the Gospel today that are connected to the feast and Eucharist:

- Note Jesus' hospitality--so should we be at our celebrations
- he says blessings... are we aware of the blessing that food is and the gift we enjoy when we eat? Do we treat food as something precious?
- Note how simple meals can satisfy in a community, and how all eat the same food and are nourished.
- God has more than enough (they had "leftovers") to satisfy our hungers at this meal.
- What kind of examples are we setting for our children in regard to simple life styles, care for others, frugality, etc.?
- "...they followed his instructions".....the hungry must be fed, we have his instructions.

Certainly, today is a day to have communion under both species. I have been to parishes where this does not happen at every mass. In that case, people have no choice—the cup is not offered. That’s hard to imagine, especially since those of us who preside at Eucharist have said over the cup, “Take this all of you, and drink from it...” Today the preacher can allude to the significance of sharing both forms of the Eucharist, the bread and cup. And if it is not yet a practice, pastors will find today a good day to begin it.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

Mays, James L. et al., eds. HARPER'S BIBLICAL COMMENTARY. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

A one volume commentary on each of the book's of the Bible with introductory essays for each book and for each general section of the Bible. An impressive list of contributors from the Society of Biblical Literature have been assembled for this commentary. Can also serve as a companion to “Harper's Biblical Dictionary”. I find this commentary very compatible for preaching in the way it discusses the biblical material.

QUOTABLE

This is not a lakeside family picnic but rather a story about a mind-boggling gathering of people who live in chaos and whose daily fare was hardly more than a subsistence serving of food. Jesus ministers to all their needs with a warm welcome, uplifting teaching, compassionate healing and sufficient physical nourishment for everyone with food to spare (twelve full baskets). The traditional Eucharistic interpretation of this passage well accords with this cultural base.

—John J. Pilch THE CULTURAL WORLD OF JESUS: SUNDAY BY SUNDAY, CYCLE C. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997, ISBN 0-8146-2288-7, page 96.

JUSTICE NOTES

Facts and Figures on Hunger and Poverty

In the developing world, more than 1.2 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1 per day.

Among this group of poor people, many have problems obtaining adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. As a result, 798 million people in the developing world are undernourished. They consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth.

Undernourishment negatively affects people's health, productivity, sense of hope and overall well-being. A lack of food can stunt growth, slow thinking, sap energy, hinder fetal development and contribute to mental retardation.

Economically, the constant securing of food consumes valuable time and energy of poor people, allowing less time for work and earning income.

Socially, the lack of food erodes relationships and feeds shame so that those most in need of support are often least able to call on it.

---- From the "Bread for the World" website.

<http://www.bread.org/hungerbasics/international.html>

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"Can you imagine what it's like to have your boy on death row? Can you imagine what it's like to visit him there every Saturday and tell him, 'I love you. I'll see you next week,' when you never know if they're going to call and say, 'He's up next—it's time for his execution.'"

---- Jeanetter Johnson, Mother of Alan Gell, who was retried and found innocent because prosecutors withheld evidence that might have cleared him of first-degree murder

[The News and Observer, February 15, 2004, Raleigh, NC]

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...

- George E. Goode #0149506 (On death row since 11/20/93)
- Martin Richardson #0343075 (11/22/93)
- Randy L. Atkins #0012311 (12/8/93)

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available: **“FIRST IMPRESSIONS PREACHING REFLECTIONS”**
 - **“Liturgical year A,”** which begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts for the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.
 - **“Liturgical years, A, B and C,”** reflections on the three-year cycle.
 - If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.
 - You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: www.preacherexchange.com and clicking on the "First Impressions" CDs link on the left.
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)
3. Our webpage: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com> - 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, [Click Here](#).

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please

go to our webpage to make an online donation:

<https://www.preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thank you,

“Blessings on your preaching”, *Jude Siciliano*, O.P.,

Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

