

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

***First reading:*** (2 Kings 4.42-44)

*Elisha feeds the Crowds*

The prophet Elisha was renowned for the wonders he worked; others are related before and after this incident. Here, he is repeating Moses' miracle of providing bread or manna for his followers. For Christians, however, the greater interest is that the miraculous feeding by Jesus is recounted in terms that deliberately recall this incident: the chance comer who provides barley loaves and more, the prophet's command, the disciple's incredulous question, the repeated command, the feeding and the food left over.

The same six steps may be seen in the gospel. So Jesus is repeating the Moses miracle after the pattern of Elisha, only a thousand times as generously: instead of 20 'loaves' (small pitta breads) among 100 men, Jesus shares out five among 5000. What is the point of this modelling of the story? For John, Jesus is a second Moses, standing in the same tradition but greater than Moses, making God known just as Moses had done, bringing to completion all that Moses had begun. 'The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.'

**Question:**

*If the story is adjusted to show the similarity of the two incidents, is it a true story? In what sense?*

***Second reading:*** (Ephesians 4.1-6)

*The Unity of the Church*

The continuing disunity among Christians makes this passage difficult to read with a clear conscience. It is perhaps the strongest plea for unity in the New Testament, with the possible exception of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper. Is there really a 'peace that binds you together'? One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all - all this is undeniable. One faith? Perhaps not in the sense of a set or list of beliefs, but all Christians profess the same awareness of inability to save ourselves; we all rely on and put our trust in God's promises, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In itself, that awareness should be enough to draw us together.

What can still justify our disunity? One comfort is that immense strides have been made, in a lifetime since the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was established, a heartening desire to understand one another and our still separate traditions. The work of the one Spirit is clear in that the generations that began this search can hardly have hoped for for such rapid convergence. Gradually we discover that the traditions in different Church communities express the same fundamental values in slightly different ways, with slightly different emphases.

**Question:**

*Do you find that the Church is a source of peace? How could this be improved?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(John 6.1-15)*

### *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*

Just like Mark's story (last Sunday's gospel), John's version of the miraculous feeding reminds us of the Eucharist, when Jesus 'said the blessing over the bread. Since this gospel has no account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, it is here particularly significant. The feeding is also described one of the 'signs' that Jesus works.

The first part of the Gospel of John is often called 'the Book of Signs' because Jesus works a number of signs which show his true quality. First comes the sign at the Marriage feast of Cana, where his sign of turning the water into wine is a sign of the messianic banquet. Other signs are the raising from the dead of the royal official's son, a sign of Jesus' gift of life, and the cure of the blind man in the Temple, a sign of Jesus' gift of light and revelation. Several of the signs are followed by an extended discourse on the Bread of Life, the Wisdom of God received in the Eucharist.

## **Question:**

*If you were going to have supper with Jesus, how would you prepare?*

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