

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug. 4-5, 2018, Cycle B

In our Sunday scripture cycles, we are in the year of the Gospel of Mark. Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four gospels we have in our New Testament. No matter how we divide Mark up, Mark just does not have enough to fill up every Sunday in Ordinary Time in a given year. So, beginning with last Sunday, the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, and continuing throughout the month of August, the Church takes the opportunity in Mark's year to reflect on chapter 6 of the Gospel of John.

Chapter 6 of John is a very important passage of his Gospel. Chapter 6 is where John develops his Theology of Eucharist, since he incorporates no institution narrative in his Last Supper scene. Instead John develops his Eucharistic Theology around the story of Jesus feeding over 5,000 hungry people with only five barley loaves of bread and two fish. In fact, John develops the most elaborate Eucharistic Theology of all four Gospels and that theological reflection begins this weekend when Jesus proclaims to the people: "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." Chapter 6 of John's gospel has come to be known as the "Bread of Life Discourse." In this chapter John gets at the "heart" of what the Eucharist is all about for Christians, why Christians believe it is important for us to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday!

What scripture teaches us is that God's providence will never fail us – but in ways we may not expect. Jesus invites the crowd who followed him to go beyond the physical concern of just filling their bellies. He invites them to see him as the True Bread of Life – the Bread who will give us a life that lasts forever – the one who can truly satisfy our deepest hungers and thirsts.

What we need to reawaken within ourselves is that we do have deeper hungers in ourselves than the hunger for perishable food. By celebrating the Eucharist, we stay as one with Him who is the Bread and Drink of Life that lasts forever. And the Good News is that we don't have to lift a finger really to receive Jesus, who is the Bread of Life. If you remember, when Jesus fed the 5,000, he asks the people to recline on the grass, before He distributes the bread to them. The message the Gospel writer is trying to convey is: the new bread of heaven – Jesus is a free gift from the Father. We know humanity's need for redemption is immense, and the little resources we bring to the task of feeding others in their needs – our five stale loaves and a few fish – seem totally inadequate! The story of the feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus reminds us that the task of redemption is Christ's work, ultimately not ours. While we must cooperate, yes, and allow Christ to work through us, we rejoice that Jesus is the one who feeds us and is Himself the Bread. All we have to do is accept His invitation.