

## HOMILY — SUNDAY OT 18 A

*Is 55:1-3*

*Ps 145* *R.* *You open your hand to feed us, Lord, and satisfy our needs.*

*Rom 8:35, 37-39*

*Mt 14:13-21*

Our first reading, taken from Isaiah 55, marks the end of the second part of the book of Isaiah, which speaks of the restoration of God's people to the land of Israel. Their exile is coming to an end, and God is calling His people back to Himself, back to fidelity.

It's in this context that we hear, *Thus says the Lord: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; ... come, buy and eat! [...] Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good... Incline your ear, and come to me; [...] I will make with you an everlasting covenant"* (Isa 55:1-3). In restoring His people, God is calling them to a banquet and a new covenant. And so it becomes an image of God's Kingdom, where thirst and hunger will be satisfied. It recalls Isaiah's earlier prophecy of the banquet of rich foods and fine wines that God will provide His people on the holy mountain (Isa 25:6f). This banquet is especially related to a new exodus and the presence of the Messiah.

This theme of banquet is at the heart of our Gospel passage today, as Jesus feeds the great crowd with an overabundance of bread. Jesus, in His compassion for the people, feeds them without cost. And while it isn't yet rich foods and fine wines, it's not insignificant that He feeds them with bread.

This abundance of bread recalls the manna from heaven that fed the people of Israel for forty years in the desert (remember, Jesus as the new or true Moses is one of the main themes of His Gospel). It also recalls the bottomless jar of flour and oil that fed Elijah, the widow and her son (1 Kg 17:8-16), as well as Elisha's miracle of multiplying twenty loaves to feed one hundred (2 Kg 4:42-44). And yet, Jesus' miracle of multiplication far surpasses both of these: He starts with less and feeds far more people.

And so, the multiplication of the loaves and fish points to the identity of Jesus! It symbolically reveals His identity as the Messiah. What was prophesied by Isaiah has now begun, and a new, everlasting, covenant is being established.

This, then, also points us forward to the Last Supper, where Jesus institutes this new and everlasting covenant in the context of the Passover meal — also known as the 'feast of Unleavened Bread' (cf. Mt 26:17) —, precisely by using bread.

Now, it's not just the presence bread that ties these two events together. Notice how Matthew describes the miracle of the multiplication: *Taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples* (Mt 13:19). This is almost word for word how Matthew also describes the last Supper! *Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples* (Mt 26:26).

And so, we begin to see now that the miracle of the multiplication is also pointing us forward to the Eucharist, the foretaste of the eternal banquet of the Lamb in heaven, the true manna for our exodus here on earth.

See how beautifully all this is tied together! The miracle of the multiplication foreshadows the Mass, whereby Jesus, who is the true bread come down from heaven (cf. Jn 6:22ff), in a sense multiplies Himself to feed us not merely with bread, but with His very self.

And all of this, Matthew tells us, happened because Jesus *had compassion for* the crowd (Mt 14:14). The word ‘compassion’ literally means ‘to suffer with’ (*com-passio*). Out of His suffering Heart (*misericors, misericordia*), Jesus not only heals and feeds the crowds, but He does so with an overabundance: *all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over..., twelve baskets full* (Mt 14:20).

The love of Jesus overflows with generosity! This is most vividly revealed to us on the Cross. And the Eucharist is the covenant sign of that abundant love, the Bread of Life that never runs dry, the Body and Blood of Jesus given to us to heal and strengthen us to live out the Christian life. My brothers and sisters, this is the gift of the Eucharist; this is the miracle that we witness at every Mass; this is the great mystery to which the Lord invites us: *Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live* (Is 55:3).

My brothers and sisters, out of His great love for us Jesus invites us to come to Him for refuge, for healing, for learning, for nourishment. Jesus gives Himself to us on the Cross and in the Eucharist to free us from our sins, to heal us, to restore us to the Father, and to form us into His image and likeness. May we answer His invitation and draw nearer to Him, not just once or twice, but over and over again. May we find our refuge in Him, our strength in Him, our life in Him, who greatly desires to satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. Amen.