

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Paradigm of the Church Second Week of Easter Friday, May 2, 2014 8:15 AM
Acts 5:34-42; **Jn 6:1-15** St. Athanasius, bishop, doctor (Here, too, Christ continuing to feed, on all levels, the hungers of humanity.)

The signs that John records are very elaborate combinations of what Jesus did and what he said, rearranged in a very unique story.

Jesus fed people many times, and often he fed many with a little bit. Here John tells this story in a very elaborate way making clear that **Jesus is concerned**, number one, **about people's physical welfare and well-being**. The first issue is these people are hungry and there's nowhere to go to get food—first issue. The second issue is: **Jesus wants his disciples to participate in the feeding**. He asks their help. He asks their counsel. He asks their guidance, and they have some. They say, well, “There is a boy here who has five loaves and some fish.” It's kind of odd that they already know this, but, again, **John is telling this story in a very specific way for specific effect**. The result, in this case as in all the others, is that a little bit goes a long way. And John means this as a paradigm.

This is a paradigm of the Church, and has two different levels of meaning. It means that when we are really dedicated to caring for others, **a little generosity goes a long way**. We needn't be discouraged by what appears to be needs beyond our capacity to fill. That is originally what the disciples thought. “Two hundred days wages would not be enough for them to have just a little.” Two hundred days wages worth of bread would not be enough for them to have just a little. That's **negative thinking. We just can't do anything. The need is just too great**. It parallels the negative thinking of the man who buried his talent. I have only one talent. The master is very strict. I'm not going to risk anything. **Life requires risking; life requires investing. Life requires generosity; life requires sharing**. Without these components we are not really alive, and we are surely not living with God.

On a deeper level, John, the author, actually also means this to be **representative of the Church** because, first of all, the fragments are gathered up. Now this is not simply a matter of picking up litter. If you have fragments of bread, you feed the birds. But here there is a deliberate effort to symbolize the Church. Twelve baskets full, **twelve baskets full like twelve apostles represents the gathering of the tribes in the end times promised by God.** And the Church represents this gathering of all the tribes, indeed, more than simply the tribes; **it's open to now the nations.** But this is the symbolism, the twelve baskets of **broken fragments**, because the Church is not a gathering of all the healed and well-heeled, the people dressed and successful. But **the Church is a gathering of everyone, including the broken.** So twelve baskets full of fragments represents this gathering of the brokenness. The twelve tribes, yes, but also the brokenness of humanity, altogether.

And of course **the reverence paid to the fragments, on another level yet, refers to the Eucharist.** Now as we use bread for the Eucharist, whether it's homemade or whether it's wafers, there are **always some crumbs.** But we don't just throw the crumbs away. We clean them up. **We consume them or dispose of them into the ground out of reverence**—again, a sign of the presence of Christ in the Church. Here, too, Christ continuing to feed, on all levels, the hungers of humanity.