

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Becoming Barley Loaves Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B July 29, 2018
10:00 AM 2 Kgs 4:42-44; Eph 4:1-6; **Jn 6:1-15** (If we are truly willing to
become this gift, what kind of stunning results do you think God will bring about?)

There is a saying: “Not to see the forest for the trees.” At times we are like that with the events in Jesus’ life. We see the event as an individual tree; **we don’t see the sweep of the whole drama.** I believe that’s the case often when we read this story, especially in the Fourth Gospel.

John says that this is taking place near Passover, very significant. This will be Jesus’ last Passover and his **Last Supper**, the supper in which the synoptic gospels say Jesus gave the **sacrament of his body and blood**, the supper in which **John does not mention bread at all.** Why? **Because in John’s mind the bread is already given; the sacrament is given now.** And it’s very clear in the gathering of the fragments that this is meant to be a sacred bread, a holy bread. Ordinary bread would be used to feed the birds, but this is sacramental bread. John, who is a theologian in his own right, is different from Mark and Matthew and Luke and Paul, who see the Eucharist primarily as a memorial of the Lord’s passion and death. John does not. **John sees the Eucharist primarily as the memorial of Jesus’ ministry of abundance, that not only feeds the belly, but feeds the whole person to satiety—to satiety.** That’s the whole idea.

And John believes the risen **Christ continues or desires to continue this ministry of feeding in abundance his people through the disciples.** However you will notice that in the story, it’s a very important point, **Jesus does not fabricate this bread out of thin air.** He begins with a gift, a paltry gift, a little gift, but **a gift: five barley loaves. God’s actions always seek interface with people.** Mark mentions that at times Jesus could work no powerful sign because of a lack of faith, a refusal to trust. **So the Eucharist is a sign of God’s willingness and desire to give, but it’s also eliciting something from us for God to work with.** When our meager

contributions meet the generosity of God great things happen, here a whole multitude is fed. But this would not have happened without the five barley loaves.

When we are willing to give the little we have to God in faith, the results can feed multitudes. There is no promise here of getting rich. That interpretation of the gospel is a twisted and self-centered version of this teaching. But there is a promise of **making a real difference in the lives of others and changing the world in a big way.** In the Third Eucharistic Prayer the priest prays: “May he,” he being Christ, the risen Christ, “May he make us an everlasting offering to you,” the you being of course the eternal Father. In other words, **may we become barley loaves. If we are truly willing to become this gift, what kind of stunning results do you think God will bring about?**