

God Provides More Than We Could Ever Imagine.

When I looked at the Gospel for this week, the thought that occurred to me was, “Oh no, the multiplication of loaves and fish again? Didn’t we just have this a few months ago?”

Maybe the same thought occurred to you. The thing is there are two multiplications of loaves and fish in *Matthew* and *Mark*, and one in *Luke* and *John*. Since the Church tries to cover all four Gospels in a three year period, we end up having what appears to be the same Gospel passage about twice a year.

Why is this passage repeated so often in the Gospels? Well, because the passage refers to God’s continual gift of the one food we need, the Eucharist. In fact, the same terminology, “he took, he blessed and he broke” is used in the multiplication scenes and in the accounts of the Last Supper when Jesus gave his Body and Blood.

By the time the *Gospel of John* was finalized, in the nineties, the primitive Church had developed a deep understanding of the Eucharist. This understanding is presented in the Sixth chapter of *John*. This long chapter of 71 verses is so important to us that every three years we spend five Sundays concentrating on this Gospel.

Three elements are emphasized in *John’s* account of the multiplication to provide a deeper understanding of the Eucharist. These elements are the time of the multiplication, references to *Psalms 23*, and the gathering of the fragments that are left over.

The *Gospel of John* places the multiplication of the loaves and fish at the time of the Passover. This isn’t just a passing note. The Passover was the sacred meal of the Jews celebrating their freedom from slavery in Egypt and the Lord’s continual protection. Jesus was providing a meal at the Passover time. He would provide another meal during another Passover. The Last Supper was the First Supper of the new People of God, eating the Body and Blood of the Lord. So, from the very start of today’s Gospel, we know that John is speaking about a lot more than loaves and fish.

If a person only knows one psalm, it would be *Psalms 23*. Some of the elements of this psalm are: The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing that I want. He leads me to green pastures, to safe waters. He restores my strength. He guides me along the right path for his names sake. Though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil. Your rod and your staff give me courage. You set a table before me, and my enemies watch. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Only goodness and love follow me all the days of my life and I shall live in the house of the Lord forever.

In today’s Gospel Jesus sees the needs of the people. He has them recline on the green grass. He restores their strength with his food. This is not just about loaves and fish. Jesus is performing a prophetic action. He provides the banquet *Psalms 23* spoke of, the Banquet of the Lord. Those who eat this food will continue to eat it in the

House of the Lord forever.

The third element that *John* emphasizes in his account of the multiplication is the recovery of the fragments that are left over. When the people of Israel gathered manna in the desert, they were told not to gather more than they needed. Moses told the people that left over manna was not to be stored. Jesus, though, tells his disciples to gather up the remains. They were entrusted with twelve baskets of bread to be preserved for the people. One of the mandates the Lord gives his disciples is to care for the food he provides so those who are not present might also eat his food. The Eucharist which is not consumed during the Christian banquet is not to be thrown out. It is the Body of the Lord. It is to be saved for those who were not able to be present at his meal so they also can partake of his food. What we have here is the biblical basis for the preservation of the Eucharist in our tabernacles. The Eucharist is stored so those who cannot attend the feast might still receive the Lord's Body.

These three elements emphasized by *John* in his account of the multiplication, the Passover, the fulfillment of Psalm 23, and the preservation of the fragments, reminds us that God has provided a meal that is far greater than we could ever hope for, or even ever imagine. How great is our God? God is so great that he has found a way for all of us to attend the eternal Passover. How great is our God? God is so great that he leads us into his presence and feeds us his meal. How great is our God? He is so great that he has found a way for each of us to join the disciples at the Last Supper, or what is really the First Supper, the First Supper of the Kingdom.

How great is our God? He is so great that he has created six billion people in the world, about fifty billion people since the beginning of time, and over and over again, he has found a way to treat each person as an only child.

When we receive communion, we are present at the Last Supper, the First Supper, and at the Banquet of the Lord. When we receive communion we enter into the intimate union with God that Jesus came to earth to provide for these creatures whom he loves so deeply.

How much our God cares for us! He has found a way to nourish our spiritual lives continually. His very Body and Blood keeps us strong. He gives us the strength to proclaim his Kingdom.

We have to catch ourselves at communion time during Mass and ask, "What am I doing?" Am I just following the crowd? Hopefully not. Am I receiving some sort of blessing? Hopefully, we realize that communion is much more than a blessing. What is it that I am doing when I receive communion? I am receiving the Food that God provides. This is the Food of the First Supper. This is the Food of the Banquet of the Lord. I am receiving, eating Jesus's Body and Blood, so I can be a strong member of the Kingdom of God.

Today we pray that every time we receive communion, we might come to a

deeper and deeper understanding of the great gift of Love that is the Eucharist.