

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 30, 2006

2 Kings 4: 42-44; Ephesians 4: 1-6; John 6: 1-15

Homilist: S. Katherine Jean Cowan

Bread for the world,
A world that hungers,
Wine for all people,
People who thirst

These words from the refrain of the popular hymn “Bread for the World” go to the heart of today’s Gospel passage from John, which recounts the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

John, while giving us the enacted parable of the washing of the feet at the Last Supper, does not give us an actual account of the institution of the Eucharist. In today’s account, which also appears in the other Gospels, John takes us to the heart of the Eucharist, human hunger crying out for relief. Jesus’ sensitivity to this natural human need leads to his making the most out of a very small offering. And this is what we his disciples will be asked to do once they have been fed at the banquet of life.

A quick look at a newspaper or the evening news shows us on a daily basis the unbelievable starvation and malnutrition that afflict our world. Despite the lavishness of creation, most of the people in the world go to bed hungry every night. As a human race, we have not learned to turn the world’s lavishness into a sufficiency for all.

But this is only one aspect of the world’s hunger. Each of us in one way or another has an unfulfilled longing or hunger within. The causes of the emptiness are as varied of the individuals hearts that yearn for more. Loss in a myriad of ways, humiliation, degradation, deprivation—all of these arouse a longing deep within.

While much of the emptiness can be momentarily be alleviated, only one thing, one person can satisfy this desperate longing. Ultimately each of us searches for the “living bread of life,” whose love and compassion can take the poorest of our offerings and satisfy any need.

Today’s Gospel asks that we allow Jesus to nurture, to cherish us. He himself distributes the bread and fish. Having accepted his care, we can, as the apostles did, care for others. We can wash one another’s feet, becoming ourselves the enacted parable of the Last Supper. “I have given you an example.”