

**Reflection on the Gospel-17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(John 6:1-15)**

-Veronica M. Lawson RSM

The gospel readings for the next two weeks are taken from John 6, a section of the gospel that focuses on food and related themes: on hungry people; on the need for food/bread; on food/bread as metaphors for life. Bread has been the staple food for millennia in bible lands. To be without bread is to lack the very basics of existence, and that is how it is for so many in our world. Even the impoverished in the so-called “first world” know what it is like to be without the means of subsistence in a world of plenty. The present cycle of readings confronts us with questions about our own lifestyle, our exploitation of earth’s precious resources, and our capacity to make a positive change in the lives of those whose access to the fruits of our earth is much more limited than ours.

In John’s account of the feeding of the 5000, the crowds keep following Jesus because they see the “signs” he works among the sick. The Johannine Jesus consistently tries to lead the people beyond a form of discipleship that is simply based on seeing the signs that he works. The inadequacy of the crowd’s response on this occasion becomes clear towards the end of the reading.

Both place and time function powerfully in the story. The “mountain” place evokes the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt Sinai. For the crowds, Jesus is the prophet like Moses who points to a way of satisfying hunger in the wilderness of life. The time is Passover, drawing into the narrative the passing over of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the desert and ultimately of the land where they could worship their God. This story is about the liberation that God brings through the agency of Jesus.

Jesus demonstrates that the answer to the suffering of the people, their liberation, is to be found in their care for each other. If they simply take the time to sit down together, discover the riches in their midst, give thanks, and distribute what they have, they may find they have more than they need. They must gather up the fragments, the “more-than-enough”, so that nothing will be lost and others might benefit from their sharing. Again, we are reminded of those in our world who have access to health care and vaccines and those who do not, of those who have financial support at this time and those who do not.

Although the people partially understand Jesus’ identity and teaching, their ultimate response is misdirected, even violent: they want to take him by force and make him king. He leaves them and returns to the mountain alone. We so often seek spectacular solutions to our problems. It may be that we too need to sit down together, on the grass or wherever, and discover the wealth we have at our disposal to satisfy the hunger in our world. That is what it means to be a Eucharistic people.