

Reflections on John 6

Archbishop Naumann - Week 1



Deacon Bill Scholl:

Welcome to Enflaming Our Hearts with Eucharistic Amazement by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, a series of reflections on the gospel of John as we contemplate our Lord's marvelous gift of Himself through the action of the mass, as Christ gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. (music)

Archbishop Joseph Naumann:

So, welcome to these Lenten podcasts, and we're going to be going through the six chapters of St. John's gospel. So we read from the gospel today:

"After this, Jesus went across the sea of Galilee of Tiberias. A large crowd followed him because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain and there, he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, 'Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?' He said this to test him because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, '200 days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?'. Jesus said, 'Have the people recline.' Now there was a great deal of grass in that place, so the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them to those who were reclining. Also, as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the fragments left over so that nothing will be wasted.' So they collected them and filled 12 wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.' Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone." The Gospel of the Lord.

Well, dear friends, we're going to spend this Lent going through this sixth chapter of St. John's gospel in preparation for the Eucharistic Revival Initiative that the Bishops' Conference has committed to for the next three years. So for the next three years the entire church in the United States will be focused on the importance and significance in the life of the church of the Eucharist. Part of the reason and motivation for the bishops to begin this initiative was a Pew Study several years ago, which revealed that a high number of Catholics, even those that go to Mass regularly, don't believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. This was stunning to

us. It's also in part because we've seen in some places much worse than here in Kansas, but a declining number of people participating in the Eucharist each week.

John's gospel is unique and it's different from the other three. John's gospel on Holy Thursday does not talk about the Eucharist per se, but instead we have the episode of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. But John, in the sixth chapter here, gives the most comprehensive teaching on the Eucharist in all of the gospels. And several years ago, I've told this story before, I was at my residence in the summer. It was very hot and naturally the air-conditioning had gone out at this time, and an air-conditioning repairman was there and we struck up a conversation. At one point he said to me that he went to an Evangelical church, but he said, "I think I'm more Catholic than Protestant."

And so I asked him why he said that. And he said, "Well, first of all," he said, "I have 10 children." I said, "Wow, that's pretty impressive." And he said, "But even more than that," he said, "I believe what you believe about the Eucharist." And he said to me, "I don't know how my brother and sister Protestants can read the sixth chapter of John and not believe in the Real Presence of the Eucharist." I said, "Wow, you should be Catholic!" But he wasn't ready to enter RCIA yet. But I think I hope all of you will take the occasion to read the entire sixth chapter of John. We're going to go through it section by section over the next six weeks. It begins with the telling of this miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

This is the only miracle story that's found in all four gospels. I think there's a great significance of that. So this sixth chapter begins with John's version of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. John sets the scene that Jesus has gone up on a mountain. There's a large crowd following him. We're told that the Jewish feast of Passover was near. And when Jesus looks out at this vast crowd, he says to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" Well, Philip is stunned by this. He sees this situation as totally impossible. He says to Jesus, "200 days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to just have a little." So he's seeing this as Jesus asking him, "How are we going to buy this food for people?"

And so the disciples, it's not said but it's implied here, their solution to this is send the people away to get their own food. But that's not what Jesus wants to do. He wants to take care of the hunger, the needs of the people. And then we're told that Andrew, the brother of Peter, comes to Jesus and says, "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." But Andrew, dejectedly says, "But what good are these for so many?" So, again, Andrew sees the impossibility, but he does, for some reason, have the faith -- and this boy has the faith -- to come forward and offer the little that they have. And this is a very significant element of this passage. We see this boy offering what obviously is totally insufficient for the need here, but offering the little that he has, and that Jesus will take this now and use this.

So, it's saying to us, in a sense, when we come up against overwhelming needs in our own life, we need to offer our Lord the little perhaps that we can do, which appears so insufficient for the

need. Whether it's in your marriage, or in parenting your children, or some need at work, employment, or at school, whatever our needs might be in human relationships, we need to offer the Lord, to give what we can to bring about a solution. So Jesus tells the disciples to have the crowd sit down and then he takes the loaves. And again, he uses very Eucharistic language here. He takes the loaves, gave thanks, and then distributed them to those who are reclining. And he does the same with the fish.

John's Gospel is a little bit unique in this because in the other gospels, He tells the disciples to distribute the food. But here, Jesus himself distributes it. And then He tells the disciples to gather up the fragments left over so that nothing is wasted. And we're told that when they collect them that these five barley loaves and two fish after everybody's eaten, filled 12 wicker baskets with the fragments that are left over. We see here something that we see in other places in the gospel as well. The wedding feast of Cana would be another example in John's Gospel of this, that Jesus' response to these human needs is super abundant, that He provides much more in the wedding feast of Cana. He gives this amount of wine that's over the top in terms of what might be consumed.

And here we see that Jesus is able to feed from what this little that the boy was able to provide for him, these thousands of people, and then have more leftovers, much more leftovers than they started with. And, of course, 12 is always a significant number in the gospels and it relates to the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 apostles. So this whole episode here shows Jesus' desire to feed the people. Here he's doing that physically, but we'll see that this will launch an occasion then for Him to give this great teaching on the Eucharist and how every time we come to the Eucharist, the Lord wants to nourish us and to satisfy the hungers of whatever it is that we come to the Eucharist needing at that particular moment.

So each week, when we come to the Eucharist, we should prepare ourselves in a way to identify what are the hungers in our heart? What are the things that we need at this particular moment in our lives? What are the things our family and those that we love and are close to us? And we need to bring that to the Lord, and we need also to share with Him the ways that we're trying to address these needs. Again, like the little boy, they're inadequate on the surface to be able to solve the issues that are before us. But again, to show our desire to the Lord, to give what we have and to show our faith that the Lord can take what appears to be totally inadequate, and He can make it sufficient. He can use it to feed his people, to nourish his people.

So I think that on a very human level, and we see that unlike His disciples who see this crowd and they just want to turn him away, but the Lord, His desire is to feed and to nourish us. And we can bring our human needs to him, those things that, very practical needs that we might have, and sometimes we're looking at the same kind of needs that the crowd has. How are we going to feed our family? How are we going to provide for all the material things that we believe that our children and those that rely on us need? So we can bring these very human hungers to

the Lord as well. But He wants to feed us, and we'll talk about this more in the succeeding weeks, He wants, through the Eucharist, to nourish our hearts and our souls as well. To fill us and feed us spiritually with this unique bread that is the Bread of Life.

I think as we see this miracle again, which we find in all of the Gospels, that it tells us about the Lord's desire to be super abundant in His generosity with us, and that the Lord has the ability to be able to quench the thirst that we have and satisfy the hungers of our hearts and of our souls. And our gift to this is to have the faith that the Lord can do whatever is necessary, to entrust these anxieties and worries if you will, to Him. One of the things in my life, and there are a lot of areas where I don't have this, but early in my life, I just felt that I was going to entrust the material needs of my life to the Lord. I had no idea. Of course, going to the seminary college was not very expensive, certainly by today's standards, but I had no idea how I was going to be able to afford this, no idea of how I would be able to someday get an automobile or a car.

But I decided early on that I wasn't going to worry about these things, that the Lord wanted me to do this ministry and I did my part, somehow He would fulfill it. And truthfully, I've never personally worried about this. Now, I don't have the same pressures that a father of a family might have in terms of the material needs, but it is true, even like sometimes the impossible needs that we have as a church in terms of caring for those within our community, both their material needs, but also their spiritual needs, is overwhelming. And yet, if we have the faith that it's not me that's going to satisfy these hungers, but if I give the little that I have, if I give the best that I can to find a human solution, but then realizing it doesn't all depend on me, that if I'm doing my best, if I'm offering this to the Lord, that somehow he will make it sufficient and adequate.

And even more than that, he is going to be super abundant. He's going to give us more than we could ask or imagine. So as we begin these reflections and we do so with this parable of the multiplication of the fish and loaves, let's pray that, as we begin to ponder this great miracle which is the Eucharist, that we can have faith in Jesus who makes Himself present to us in this Blessed Sacrament, and faith that whatever are the needs in our life at this moment, both material, but is also emotional and spiritual, that the Lord desires to feed those and to nourish those, to satisfy those longings of our hearts. Let us entrust our lives to the Lord, confident that He is this super abundant God who will not be outdone in responding to our cries, to our needs. Thanks for listening today, and God bless. (music)