a Kendall Hunt Company

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 55:1–3
Psalm 145: 8–9, 15–16, 17–18
Romans 8:35, 37–39
Matthew 14:13–21

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

The story of the miraculous feeding of the multitude was extremely important in the early Church. It is recounted six times in the gospels, with each version shaped in slightly different ways according to the particular concerns of the evangelist. Matthew writes to a community for whom the ritual of the Lord's Supper had already become a venerable and central tradition, and he is eager for his audience to recognize in this story a foreshadowing of the Christian Eucharist as well as the fulfillment of ancient messianic hopes.

Commentators often point out the highly symbolic character of the meal stories in the gospels. In particular, when one sees the familiar language of Christian Eucharist ("took . . . blessed . . . broke . . . gave") used to describe the miracle, it is fairly obvious that the evangelist wishes his readers to make certain associations. Matthew is telling his audience something about their own Eucharist. The abundance of the twelve baskets of leftovers represents the twelve tribes of the New Israel (an important theme in Matthew), presided over by the twelve disciples (see Matthew 19:28). Matthew suggests that the Christian Eucharist, itself foreshadowed of old in the Jewish scriptures, is in its own way a foreshadowing of the messianic banquet still anticipated by the Christian community to whom he writes.

The metaphor of hunger and thirst and the gracious act of offering food and drink are primal symbols in the scriptures for our human dependence on God and for God's grace and care for us in every circumstance of need. By the time Deutero-Isaiah penned today's promise to the

exiles in Babylon at the conclusion of his Book of Consolation, the image of a banquet set by God for the people was already an ancient symbol of Israel's hope in God. Here, the imagery is lavish in the extreme: All are invited, without exception. "Rich fare" is offered: wine and milk and bread, all without cost, so that Yahweh may "renew with you the everlasting covenant."

Catholic Doctrine
Eucharist as Meal

The Eucharist perpetuates and makes present to us, here and now, the sacrifice of the cross of Jesus Christ. But the sharing of communion is likewise essential to the meaning of the Mass (CCC 1382). The Second Vatican Council was concerned to renew in the faithful a vital sense of the Eucharist as meal. This is one of the reasons why the General Instruction to the Roman Missal directs that the bread to be used for the Eucharist "appear as actual food" (GIRM 283) and why offering communion under both forms is preferable to offering communion under the form of bread alone (GIRM 240). This sacramental meal is not simply like any other act of eating and drinking. Those who eat and drink this sacred meal in faith have a share in the death and saving sacrifice of Jesus. The Church believes that eating and drinking at the table of the Lord places one in intimate communion with Christ whose loving sacrifice is made on our behalf (CCC 1382).

Partaking in the Lord's Supper also nourishes the spiritual life of the believer. Much as ordinary or material food strengthens and helps our bodies to grow, Eucharist promotes the spiritual growth begun in us at baptism. Just as we cannot hope to survive without material food, the Eucharist is necessary for our growth in the life of faith (CCC 1392). This is the reasoning behind the Church's encouragement to the faithful to receive Eucharist every Sunday (CCC 1389).

Last of all, the sacred meal of the Eucharist reminds us of the paschal feast of heaven, the banquet which awaits all the faithful at the end of their earthly pilgrimage. The image of heaven as a feast has long been revered in Catholic tradition (CCC 1027). In the liturgy, immediately before communion, we recall this eternal banquet in the words, "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper." The "supper of the Lamb" described in the Book of Revelation (19:9) is a "wedding banquet" uniting the faithful with Christ forever (CCC 1329). The banquet of heaven is thus an eschatological image of joy and hope.

The eating and drinking which takes place in the Eucharist is celebrated in the context of a gathering of the faithful, that is, the Mass. Catholics come together to hear the Word of God proclaimed in scripture, to reflect upon that Word and, having offered intercessions for the Church, the world, and for particular needs, the community then presents to the table of the

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Lord gifts of bread and wine. The gathering itself signifies the presence of Christ, for Christ is present in the assembly of his people. Gathered around the altar, the Church enters into the action of Christ at the Last Supper who took bread and blessed, broke, and gave it, and who took a cup and shared it (CCC 1350). These elements of a people gathered together by Christ, who then “blessed, broke, gave” (Matthew 14:18) are reflected in today’s gospel which clearly prefigures the Last Supper and illuminates the abundance of the gift of the Eucharist.