

The Most Holy Trinity
May 26, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #22

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, ‘There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves, and two fishes: but what are these among so many?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down; likewise also of the fishes as much as they would. And when they were filled, he saith unto his disciples, ‘Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which remained over unto them that had eaten. When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, ‘This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world.’” (John 6:8-14)

As I mentioned last weekend, the sixth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel is very important for our understanding of the Eucharist. Likewise, an understanding of both the Old Testament and the Messianic expectations of Israel are important to our reflection of the sixth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel.

The sixth chapter of the Gospel of John begins with the retelling of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. In his book, Worthy is the Lamb: The Biblical Roots of the Mass, Thomas Nash stresses the importance of this miracle when he writes: “Apart from the Resurrection, this is the only miracle that all four Gospels report (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14).” Necessarily, this would lead one to wonder as to the significance of the miracle. Placing ourselves in the mindset of a first century Jewish person either witnessing or hearing about this miracle, our minds would be drawn back to the earlier prophets of the Covenant. We can read of two similar miracles performed in the Old Testament. The prophet Elijah, speaking with a widow of Zarephath, foretold the containers of oil and flour she had used to provide food for herself and her son would not run dry until the Lord sent rain to water the ground (1 Kings 17:8-16). The second example came from the life of the prophet Elisha who was Elijah’s disciple and followed after him. When a man brought the prophet twenty barley loaves and a sack of grain, Elisha directed these be distributed to a number of men with some small amount left over (2 Kings 4:42-44). In both instances, no natural explanation is provided for the miracle. Both are seen as being accomplished because of the Word spoken by the Lord and this Word being obeyed.

Another example from the Old Testament, the one the people recalled to mind, dealt with the person of Moses. Moses, as we have spoken of prior, prayed to the Lord who fed the people with manna throughout their wilderness travels. The children of Israel had long

cherished a prophecy of Moses which spoke of a future prophet who would be brought forth by the Lord and would be similar to himself (Deuteronomy 18:15). After witnessing the feeding of such a large number, they associated Jesus providing food with Moses and the manna. This explains why they thought Jesus was the future prophet Moses spoke of.

Jesus, in correctly stating that it was the Lord and not Moses who had provided the manna in the wilderness, is now able to begin His teaching on the “True Bread” which comes down from Heaven. It will be this bread which will do the same thing as the other examples provided. It will be able to feed the multitudes. However, this Heavenly Bread will accomplish something the others could not. It will feed both the physical and spiritual parts of those who partake of it.