

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. John 6:1-15

For centuries many have fallen away from the one true faith revealed to us in Christ and have sought to do violence to revelation by distorting by false interpretations and have, in turn, accused our Holy Mother Church, of the same violence. Above all else many have accused the Church with inventing the Mass and the Eucharist and denying that almighty God could make Himself truly present before us in this life. But we have only to read holy scripture with the mind of the Church, which is guided by the Holy Spirit, to see just how clearly Our Lord desired and intended and instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

This Gospel is a clear sign of the will of Our Lord and how clear it is that in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes lies the precursor to the institution of the Mass. St. John tells us that the Jewish feast of the Passover was near and we know that it was at the Passover, at the Last Supper, that the Lord instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood which are inseparably bound to one another. Here on the banks of the Sea of Galilee crowds gathered around Our Lord because they had seen signs of His healing in the same way that it is only Baptised Catholics who are able to receive Holy Communion because we ourselves have been healed of original sin by the grace of Baptism. And from these people were brought the loaves and fishes which today is paralleled in the offerings of the bread and wine. With these gifts Our Lord gave thanks of which the Eucharistic Prayer is itself an echo. And with these gifts He distributed them to the people just as the Priest himself stands before the altar as the people draw close to receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord. And with those fragments that remained the Lord instructed that they be carefully gathered in the same way that the Priest gathers the Hosts that remain and reposes these in the ciborium

in the tabernacle. How then, could any argue that the holy Mass is an invention? It was clearly Christ's idea from the beginning.

Last year at a parish church in New Jersey in the United States, there is a story of what is being investigated as a miracle. At a Sunday Mass as Holy Communion was being given to the people, the Priest realised that there were not enough Hosts, but when he looked again in the ciborium, the Hosts had multiplied and he could continue to give Holy Communion to another 100, 150, people in the congregation. And when he returned to the altar he realised that there were more Hosts now than at the beginning.

It is so easy for us to see when something evil, something hurtful, happens to us but we make it so difficult to see when something good, something holy, happens for us. Every time we come to Mass we see right before our eyes bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of Our Lord. But do we really appreciate what has taken place? Or are we caught up in our own thoughts, thinking about this and that, without really seeing or even trying to see that right in front of us is God Himself.

The Apostles themselves suffered in the same way. St. Philip saw the huge crowds and was worried about how to feed them. St. Andrew took to Our Lord a boy who had some bread and fish but he was also thinking that it wouldn't be enough. But right in front of them was Our Lord, who they had seen perform miracles before, who had taught them who He truly was, but they were still overcome by their own doubts.

We can be intrigued by the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, we can be amazed by the possible miracle in New Jersey of the multiplication of the Sacred Hosts at Holy Communion, but the real miracle, the one to which we should behold with fear and awe is the fact that some bread and wine have become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord and that same Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Himself is given to us.