

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

July 25, 2021

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 4:42–44 † Ephesians 4:1–6 † John 6:1–15



Reflection by: Sister Elizabeth Michael Boyle, OP

Like a 21st century journalist, the author of the Gospel of the Loaves and Fishes seeks to ensure trust in the authenticity of his fantastic narrative by citing statistics: a crowd estimate of 5,000; an authoritative prediction of resources required to meet its immediate needs; an economist's projection of its prohibitive cost; the expansion of a meager five loaves of bread and two fishes to an exact count of twelve baskets of leftovers. All these statistical facts establish the enormous size of the problem. Its solution proves absurdly small: one observant child provokes the crowd to action. Jesus' part in the astonishing event seems minimal: looking at the crowd with compassion, he sees their hunger and responds to it.

Besides the Eucharistic symbolism usually inspired by this text, a modern commentator might prefer to interpret the story as a call to social action. In this reading, Jesus' solution to human hunger demonstrates the power of the community to expand its resources by sharing them. Like demonstrators at a political rally, this crowd has come out into the desert hoping for a spectacle, a demonstration of one prophet's power. Jesus demonstrates for them their own power to solve problems by a communal act of faith completed in a compassionate sharing of resources, material and spiritual.

Neither interpretation permits us to conclude the Eucharistic encounter in church.

