

Beloved in Christ, the theme that runs through the readings is that “**Jesus is our Bread of Life**”. John has devoted the whole Chapter Six to developing his Eucharistic theology. John points out a truly miraculous sign that Jesus performed. A sign that points to a simple and yet profound statement: God’s grace is superabundant. In fact, there are several moments in the Gospel reading that are easy to overlook that unlock for us the deeper spiritual meaning of this passage and set the context for the rest of the sixth chapter. For instance, the chapter begins with Jesus going across the **Sea of Galilee** and a large crowd following him, because they saw the signs he had performed on the **sick** (Jn.6:2). For John’s community, these opening lines of the chapter have a deeper spiritual meaning because a relationship with Jesus begins with the Sacrament of Baptism, after John chapter three. Following Jesus across the **Sea of Galilee** also calls to mind the Hebrews following Moses **across the Red Sea**. We follow Jesus through the waters of Baptism to the Promised Land. With this in mind, let us focus on the Gospel. The Gospel says that Jesus went up on the mountain. Again, we are dealing with a symbol because there aren’t any mountains near the Sea of Galilee; there are rolling hills. John calls one of these hills “a mountain” because mountains are places well noted **with theophany**. We can’t get closer to heaven than on a mountain. The meaning of this symbol is that we can’t get closer to heaven than Jesus, because Jesus is the gate of heaven.

Again, John tells us that the Jewish feast of Passover was near. Ask yourself, what day did Jesus die for our sins? Remember, it was during the feast of Passover. Therefore, John Chapter Six needs to be understood in terms of Jesus’ **paschal mystery**. Confer the title John gave to Jesus, “behold the **lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**” (Jn.1:29). This is a reference to Passover; the miraculous sign that is about to happen in this Gospel reading. Andrew points out a boy who had five loaves and two fish (Jn.6:9). The five loaves seem symbolic of the five books of the Torah, representing the old covenant. The word **fish** was used as an acronym describing **Jesus** by the Early Church. The word fish in Greek is Ichthys, translated out as “**Jesus Christ Son of God [the] Savior**”. That there were two fish suggests again that in the person of **Jesus heaven and earth are bridged**. The numbers 5 and 2 add up to 7, which in my mind add up to the number of days in a week. This seems reflective of the circle of time we find ourselves in this life; the human condition that the old covenant cannot help us escape. By offering the blessing, Jesus becomes the eighth item in this picture; doesn’t he? Eight is an important number for the early Christians. Christians worship on Sunday rather than Saturday because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Early Christians understood Sunday as also being the eighth day; the day that celebrates eternal life; the day that never ends.

The meaning of the miraculous sign of Jesus multiplying the bread and fish for John seems to be: **if we follow Jesus through the waters of baptism, we will inherit the Kingdom of heaven**. Because this happens in context to the Passover (cf. Exodus) and even if we find ourselves in a deserted place, Jesus will feed us with bread from heaven that has the power to save. This bread is salvific because this bread comes from Jesus’ person and is meant to be food for our journey through life as we make our pilgrimage to the eighth day, the day of salvation, the day that never ends. In our Gospel reading, when the people saw the sign Jesus had done, they said, “**This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world**” (Jn.6:14; Cf. Is.25:6-7). The Gospel reading concludes with the provocative statement, “Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.” Jesus was not interested in becoming a political ruler. **Jesus was interested in becoming our savior and paschal lamb for the salvation of our souls**. This concept was lost on the people who were fed that day.

Finally, brothers and sisters, in the first reading, Elisha the prophet, empowers his servant to feed the hundred people with just twenty barely loaves, prefigures the miraculous feeding Jesus empowers the disciples to feed thousands with five loaves and two fish. This miracle is to teach us that, every day God wants us to **reach out beyond our perceived human ability** and build up his kingdom here in our midst. How can we find the strength to trust and act on faith? Do we ever find ourselves too focused on earthly things or on heavenly things? The earthly things we chase after have a bad habit of turning into dust. The heavenly activities we pursue, like simple acts of kindness, have the supernatural ability to multiply that can produce an abundant harvest of grace in our lives that follows us to heaven. May God give us grace to focus on the heavenly things all the days of our lives. Amen!