

## **M.E.A.L.**

Homily of July 31, 2005  
by Father Michael Dibble

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There is here in Northern California a waitress who is the most enthusiastic, effervescent waitress in Western Christendom. She really is. I mean you sit at the table, she says, “You got it!” ...“I’d like some angelhair pasta.” ....“You got it!” “...with some iced tea.” “You got it!” And when she brings the plates, “You got it.” ...And when she brings the bill, “You got it!” And when you are leaving the restaurant, when you wave goodbye, “You got it!” I’m not exaggerating!

Today is a “You got it” gospel. People are hungry. And the Apostles say, “OK, what are we going to do?” And Our Lord basically says to them then, to us today, “You got it. They’re hungry. You got it.” I have spared you an acronym for many weeks, but we have a little acronym today. These are to help me remember. The acronym is M E A L. It’s all about a miracle MEAL, the Gospel, M-E-A-L. (M, Meeting. E, Eucharist. A, All of us. And L, Light.) We need food but we need light. M-E-A-L.

M, meeting, the miracle meal of today’s gospel. It’s a meeting. It’s a meeting, a whole lot of people, not, not, NOT a business meeting. I know many of you have business meetings and some of you dread them. It’s not a business meeting, this meeting in today’s gospel. It’s not a political meeting and, God be praised, it’s not a faculty meeting. Thirty years of faculty meetings.... After a while you just doodle or draw, list my favorite movies., faculty meetings that always ended in a resoundingly decisive e-resolution.

Now this is a meeting of you and me with the Lord, which includes a meal. It’s also humanizing. Years ago, I read this great article by an anthropologist, (I wish I had saved it!) an anthropologist who said he was amazed at how many primitive societies get together between seven and ten days for what we would call a kind of “spiritual meeting.” If I had saved it... the National Geographic.... I loved that article! There’s just kind of a human need to gather and pray. It’s also humanizing, particularly for people like me and maybe a couple at Mass today who need a large meeting. Some of us are born with a DNA that’s completely anti-social. “Leave me alone!” Family barbecues... ? I’d rather die. Picnics? No thanks. Large restaurant gatherings? Uh-uh! It’s a defect. And it’s a humanizing thing to gather together.

Notice today’s gospel, Our Lord prays in two ways. The first, he is heartbroken about the death of his cousin, John the Baptist, and he goes off by himself, in private prayer. But then he comes back and there is the gathering of all the people, communal prayer, miracle meal, Mass, all of us together. Especially do we, some of us, need the humanizing element of gathering with our fellow believers. It says Our Lord “was moved with pity.”

All these people, wandering around, he brings them together. His heart was moved with pity. We need help. You got it! Come and sit down together. You got it!

The second of the acronym, E, is Eucharist. The scholars whom I consult, the Catholic Bible Scholars, in six books, this is a typical line explaining today's gospel, "Today's gospel is an eschatological pre-figuring of the Messianic banquet, a paradigm of the Eucharistic feast, in the existential vein of true bread and nutrition." .... OK. uh-huh. Yes, OK. I am grateful for these books and I honor the scholarship. But it's also a meal, a meal for the hungry. The Eucharist.... Of course it's a pre-figuring of the Last Supper. Of course it's a prefiguring of the feast of Paradise. But it's also a meal for hungry people. Our Lord says, "Take and eat." I have to keep repeating this because I have been going to Mass every day since I was fourteen. And, for myself, I have to remember Jesus did not say, "Take and eat this which is a deeply metaphysical mysterious union of matter and form and it is an existential proof of the sublime, mysterious mystery of the matter and... and you will understand it with utter clarity and logical precision." Uh-uh! .... "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and eat." And today's miracle meal is a pre-figuring of the Last Supper. We once had a priest come to us in the seminary. He was a chaplain in a prison, and he led some guys to their deaths. He was the chaplain. He had to. And he said, "These guys don't lie as they are going to die in an hour. They don't buffalo you." And Our Lord, the night before he dies, isn't going to waste any words or waste empty symbols. "Take and eat. This is my body," the night before he dies. They were very hungry. And so are we. You got it! You got it!

The third letter, A, in the acronym is All. All ate. All in that bunch ate. Do you know, in the four gospels, this is the only miracle that Our Lord worked that's in all four gospels. It's the only miracle that's in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In fact, in one of the four, it's Philip who makes the objection. Today's gospel said the apostles objected, "How are we going to feed them with..." But it's Philip. "We got two loaves and a couple of fish. What are we going to..." Philip was always so sceptical. I love him! Sceptical, questioning. Even at the Last Supper, "How are we supposed to..." Of course, he died later as a martyr, but they all said, "C'mon..." And yet, later, it was the only miracle that all four gospels recorded. Even sceptics got fed, even Philip, and some of the Pharisees and Scribes. Don't you think that some of Our Lord's enemies were in the crowd? I'm sure they were. What's he going to say today? Get this down in writing. That they all ate, all, and they were satisfied.

It's important that we recognize some things as miracles. When I took that sabbatical, the academic sabbatical for priests all over the world down near Stanford, one of the teachers said that with this particular miracle, what could have happened was this. What really happened was the people were so moved at Jesus' munificence and the magic of his message that the people sitting around opened their wicker baskets, their picnic baskets and they shared. It was a sociological miracle. ....Oh, sure. It could have been and, in a way, it is a kind of a social miracle, sharing your picnic. But I think some of us, particularly some highly gifted theologians, are a little queasy about admitting miraculous power. That's the impression I get. "Well, we can explain it rationally." ....No, not all of those things! And when your own mind, highly educated Catholic adults, sitting at Mass, even if

some of them say, “Uh-huh. Yeah. Give me a break.” ..... You have a mind as well as a heart.

So I turn, as always, to C. S. Lewis who has written a whole book (in paperback) “Miracles.” He talks about today’s miracle and explains how it could, yes indeed, have been a true miracle. What nature does, a farmer casts a couple of seeds, and the next season, you get a corn field. What nature does, we take totally for granted. A man and woman make love and a zygote suddenly blossoms ..... a child, eyes and ears and a brain. Why couldn’t Jesus with a few things, a couple of loaves and a couple of fishes, work with great power, the Messiah, a similar miracle that nature does all the time and we take for granted? The name of the book is “Miracles.” It’s solid intellectual scholarship. You don’t have to be afraid or shrink when you hear about a miracle, not with adult intelligence, you don’t have to be embarrassed. It also says that everybody ate, even the sceptics.

Now, I live in a little cottage, as I have told you, by myself. And when I am not needed for weekday Masses, which I’m not here, I say Mass by myself in my cottage because some people say, “Say a Mass for my Aunt Tillie who is having an operation.” Ok. Sure. When is it? Tuesday? I’ll say a Mass at my house on Tuesday. There are some theologians and liturgists, first rate people in the Church, who would say, “You say Mass alone? ... The Mass is a communal, spiritual exercise. It is meant to be with people, not for your own private little....” I know. I know. But I don’t have a car and they really don’t think you should have Mass by yourself. So I respond by saying, “I have my Irish terrier and he attends the Mass.” Now this is five years. I am not imagining. This terrier is a whirlagig, a whirlagig, whirling dervish most of the time. In the five years I’ve been saying Mass alone in my house, that dog sits. I’m not imagining it. And he has more rapt attentiveness than many an adult I see in..... (laughter) ...on the East Coast, that is! When Mass is over, he is back to being a whirling dervish. He is a creature. He’s one of God’s creatures. Maybe there is a kind of mystery that even creatures appreciate about something sacred going on, not about the priest, but about the actual Eucharist. So, I don’t say Mass alone. And the gospel today adds, “Women and children included.” You have to remind yourselves, as I do, that a spiritual teacher, particularly a Jewish teacher, in Our Lord’s day, you don’t have women and kids around. He was teaching and curing. You don’t have women and children. You just didn’t. It was not done. And the gospel adds, tenderly and really, “Women and children were there.” ....(In a deep voice) Well they shouldn’t have been there! Not in our patriarchal society!! And they all ate. All ate. ....You got it!

And finally, the last letter in the acronym is Light. The first part of today’s meal, in the gospel, Our Lord is healing them, curing the sick and teaching. And then he gives them something to eat. He gives them some light, some light before they eat. Now, I have, as I told some of you when we were together on a Sunday once a month, I have my “buzzards.” They are invisible, mean, malicious, malevolent critters. They are invisible, what other people call “the voice in my head” or some people say “that committee that is always dark and putting me down, putting religion down.” My buzzards (I’ve had them since I was six.), when it comes to light, the Eucharist, going to Mass, these buzzards love the dark, and sometimes they flap, you know. I once told this to a Catholic nun psychiatrist and she backed away from me. “You see buzzards, Father?” It’s a metaphor, Sister. It’s a metaphor. But, when it comes to Mass when they are flapping, maybe you have run across a couple of them in different forms from mine, but ....”You’re not gonna go to Mass again. Are ya? When you were a kid

you were dragged to Mass by your parents. Now you are a parent. You drag the kids to Mass. C'mon. It's Sunday. It's hot. Stay home. Snooze. Have a couple of scotches. You can skip once and you're not gonna go to hell. In fact, take the summer off. You don't need that stuff. You've heard it since you were a little kid. Relax." Stay in the dark. That's the buzzard. "It's boring. That ham-bone preacher. Why doesn't he go on the stage? Relax. In fact, take the year off, from Mass. You've had it up to here." What the buzzard is saying is "Stay in the dark. Stay in the dark. Isn't it comfortable here in the dark?" That's when he is flapping his wings, and when he is snapping his beak, snapping, (Go along in your tolerant way with this metaphor.) when he is snapping with his beak, you are at church and he is snapping in your ear and saying, "Oh look at all those phonies. Do you believe it? Oh, here comes the typical Catholic family. Isn't it sweet? There's Dad smiling that prosperous smile and there's Mom, the Mother of the Year, and look at the little kids. Aren't they absolutely wretch-making, sweet little Catholic family? Phonies! Hypocrits! Liars!" A lot of teenagers I taught used to say that on Monday, "Oh, I saw all the phonies at Mass yesterday." Stay in the dark. Stay in the dark. Snap! Criticize! Snap, snap! OK. But the buzzards can't take the light, and so my buzzard, even when I was a kid, when you got into Mass and Mass began to develop, the buzzard hates the light, hates spirituality, hates reference to Christ, hates iconography of Christ, hates all. The buzzard, which I think is kind of an evil spirit, draws up its wings and takes a nap, goes to sleep. It doesn't flap. It doesn't snap. It naps. It's bored by the light, bored by Christ. It doesn't want anything to do with him. And a lot of times I hope that you find what I call the buzzard leaves you alone, maybe the last thirty minutes of Mass. He certainly naps during the homily, but maybe the last thirty minutes of Mass he leaves you alone. Oh, he will flap again on Monday, but at least on Sunday, you had the miracle meal.

Lord, I am a spiritually hungry human being. I want the miracle meal. I want the meeting. I need the Eucharist. I know it's important that we are all together. And I sure need some light in all the darkness. To which Our Lord responds, "Well, you are here. Aren't you? ...You got it!"