

**“Eucharist and Peace”**  
Homily of July 30, 2006  
by Fr. Brian Joyce

---

The passage with the story of the multiplication of loaves is very familiar to us, but we might miss how significant and crucial and remarkable it is, for a lot of reasons. Number one, of all the wonders and miracles and signs attributed to Jesus during his lifetime, there is only one that is reported in all four gospels. And this is it, the only time all four gospel writers said, “This is so crucial and important, we are all going to write it down even if we’re just copying each other. Secondly, scholars point out that this obviously comes from some sort of eye-witness report because of the details, for example, that there was a lot of grass in the place there or that there were five thousand men in a male-dominated society. That was typical at the time, that women and children just didn’t seem to count. But it also is remarkable and significant for the life of Jesus, for his life and his time, because, in many ways, this scene was the trigger that led to the opposition and hostility to Jesus, that led directly to his execution, his crucifixion, his death. See, you’ve got the Jewish leaders down in Jerusalem hearing about this teacher and this organizer who is gathering thousands of people, thousands of people across the policies and practices and laws about who gets to associate with whom, who should have anything to do with each other and he breaks down the caste system and he has all these different people from different walks of life and different levels of the caste system and they’re listening together and they are actually eating together. As if that isn’t enough, the gospel writers give us a few hints. Some of the gospel writers point out that they were gathered in companies of fifty and a hundred, the numbers of military battalions and platoons. And the people wanted to make him king. Wouldn’t that be enough to scare the authorities?! And wasn’t that the start of the opposition and the beginning of the crucifixion of Jesus?

So it is very remarkable, a significant scene, for the life of Jesus, but we don’t live in the time of Jesus. What about our time? What about our time? Well, it’s significant for us because it’s not about food. We go to Safeway, 7-11. We don’t have to worry about multiplication of loaves. It’s about the Eucharist. The writer is careful to say, “It happened around the Passover time.” You know what happens at Passover, Christ’s Last Supper. And Jesus takes the bread, lifts his eyes to heaven, gives thanks to God, blesses it, and shares it with those who were reclining, reclining as people did during the Passover meal. The gospel writer is saying, “For you in 2006, this is about the Eucharist. It’s about Jesus feeding you and nourishing you and teaching you and telling you how to live.”

It’s interesting. This was from John’s gospel, what I read to you. Now, John, the teenager (It’s not Mary Magdalene. It’s John who is next to Jesus at the Last Supper.) and John the Evangelist,

who in a way is a spiritual ancestor of John the Disciple, tells us the gospel story and he never mentions that at The Last Supper Jesus took bread and said, "This is my body." He leaves it out. It's here. He has it in the multiplication of the loaves because we are reminded that we are a Eucharistic people, to be nourished by the teaching and the life of Jesus. And, if we look closely, we see why people follow Jesus and what Jesus was all about. The first line of that gospel says, "They came to him because he was healing the sick and because he was feeding them, both spiritually and physically. He came to teach shalom, to call us to a just and lasting peace, to call our human race to wholeness." Isn't it ironic that we can pretty much place where this happened, and you only have to go a couple of miles, really thousands of yards, to the UN Peacekeepers' building that was bombed for eight days last week, until the four peacekeepers from four different countries were killed before anyone could get in to rescue them, despite six hours of calls to say "Stop the bombing." Isn't it ironic that within thirty or forty miles of this scene where Jesus shares the bread of life and calls us to shalom, to peace, within thirty or forty miles is the heaviest bombing into Lebanon by the Israelies and the return missiles and fires by Hezbollah. Isn't it ironic and isn't it sad? And it seems like it is far off, but we have to keep in mind that it is our tax dollars and our funds that sped up and accelerated and expanded this shipping of bombs and jet fuel to make this start and happen? It's sad.

The vision and challenge in the call of Jesus remains in clear contradiction to what goes on in our world today. And I don't know how we work it out. The politics are complicated. The concern for safety and the fear of terrorists is complicated. The continuing deep-seated revenge and anger that goes back so many years, it is complicated. But as a Eucharistic people, we have to again and again gather and be reminded again and again that Jesus calls us to be healing wounds and scars as he did, and to be nourishing people in body and soul as he did, and to be a people who really make a difference in our world. You know, Tuesday evening Father Terry sang music. We had songs of faith and lessons of faith, and he is just wonderful! We are so glad to have him with us! But he sang several songs about peace: "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda," "The Green Fields of France" and his own composition, "Unlearned Lessons," about the horror of war. But one thing that saddened me even more was the songs are all about the toll taken on young soldiers, sometimes senselessly, always painfully, always tragically. But that's not what we are dealing with now. We're not dealing with soldiers who have decided or agreed to take up arms. We are dealing with men, women and little children. What was it, thirty were found killed today? It's sad. So I have asked Terry to remind us of an alternate vision, an alternate spirit, an alternate kingdom for our politics, for our policies and for our world.

Father Terry sings, while strumming his guitar:

"Good night," I said to my little son,  
So tired out when the day was done.  
Then he said as I tucked him in,  
"Tell me, Daddy, what color's God's skin?"

Chorus:

What color is God's skin?

What color is God's skin? I said, "It's black, brown; it's yellow.

It's red. It's white.

Everyone's the same in the good Lord's sight."

He looked at me with those shining eyes.

I knew I could tell no lies

When he said, "Daddy, why do the different races fight

If we're all the same in the good Lord's sight?"

Chorus

"Son, that's a part of our suffering past

But the whole human family is learning at last

That the things we missed on the road we trod

Was walking as the daughters and the sons of God."

Chorus