

**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time • B**  
**July 25-26, 2009**  
**Christ the King**

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Through the month of July, we have been offered a baptismal refresher course in ministry. Jesus' disciple-in-training program has included the appropriate manner and attitude of being a part of a community, a global community. Jesus calls us to be radically available to each other. He calls to let the needs of others to take precedence over our own needs. He invites us to let our time become their time. Jesus challenges us to let our talents become a means of easing their suffering. He asks us to use our treasure to become gifts that are freely shared.

Today the course continues as our readings coach us that authentic ministry demands that we go the extra mile, calling us to tend even to the physical hungers of those whom God has entrusted to our care. By God's power and grace, Elisha stretched 20 barley into a meal that fed 100 men, not counting women and children. By God's grace and power, Jesus provided food for 5000 men, not counting women and children, with five barley loafs and a couple of dried fish. So great is Jesus' generosity, that 12 full baskets were left over.

But this story is about so much more than a great number of hungry people being wondrously fed and satisfied. If that were the point, Jesus could have just given each person some money to go buy what they needed. Or he could have had the first-century equivalent of Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) drop from the skies as the crowds returned home. Recall in scripture the many times God ensured that hungry had sufficient food (manna, quail, water from the rock).

Jesus is doing something much more. Jesus isn't simply fixing food for the road, a drive-through meal for the many. Here, Jesus is **gathering with** the hungry in the context of a shared meal, not only **to feed and to be fed** but to **enter into covenant** with those gathered. Jesus sets the example for those who follow him in ministry. We are called not simply to dole out bread and fish, but to **take, bless, give thanks** and **share** our food together with the hungry and the poor. We are called into **relationship** with them. We are called to offer nourishment and commitment, food as well as fellowship.

In the world of Jesus, meals were not shared casually or without profound significance. Those who ate together were bound to one another because in their sharing of food together, a covenant of mutual friendship, caring and responsibility was established. When Jesus and the disciples ate together with the gathered crowd, they were announcing that a new relationship had been created; a relationship between Jesus, the disciples and all the hungry. From that time onward, all present became responsible for one another. All are now covenanted as friends and more than friends. Through their sharing, all become brothers and sisters. Their lives, their hopes, their futures are forever intertwined and interdependent.

This same relationship is extended each time Jesus sat and sits down with others. Think of the many times Jesus accepted and shared a meal: the home of Simon, the table of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Peter's house, remember Zacchaeus and the newly married couple at Cana. At each meal, Jesus was saying, "I am yours, you are mine. We are one in our food and one in our lives."

All of those meals, the meal of barley loaves and fish anticipate an even more significant meal that Jesus would host and share with his own. That meal would remember the gift of himself on the cross and the covenant made with all humanity through his blood.

That meal would celebrate the union of love that forever unites us with God, with Jesus, with one another, with the world.

As we gather for **this** meal, we take, bless, give thanks and share our food together with the hungry and the poor. It is Jesus who is present. It is Jesus who calls us together. It is Jesus who calls us into relationship with himself, with each other and with the whole world. Here Jesus is **gathering us** not only **to be fed and to feed** but to **enter into covenant**. Here we are called into **relationship** with God, with each other and with the poor. Here we are called to offer nourishment and commitment, food and fellowship. Here we are called to be disciples.