“Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted” (John 6:11). In today’s Gospel, Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish to feed about 5,000 men, not counting women and children. The Eucharistic overtones of the meal bear some comparisons with our own Mass.

In the Gospel, a boy offers what he has, five barley loaves and two fish. At Mass, we bring forward an offertory gift of bread and wine on behalf of the community. It is helpful to think of our offering in terms beyond the bread and wine. We are asked to provide financial contribution for the needs of the church and the care of the poor. We also bring our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, and even our crosses and trials so that Jesus may bring hope and healing to our lives.

In the Gospel, people were hungry and thankful that Jesus provided a meal for them. Our Liturgy of the Eucharist is a prayer of thanksgiving. We are thankful to God for our daily bread, the Eucharist. We are thankful for his sacrifice on the cross which opened the gates of heaven for us with the promise of eternal life. We are thankful for our relationship with the God who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

In the Gospel, Jesus gave thanks. “The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In this prayer, the celebrant acts in the person of Christ as head of his body, the Church. He gathers not only the bread and the wine, but the substance of our lives and joins them to Christ’s perfect sacrifice, offering them to the Father.”

In the Gospel Jesus is speaking so that 5000 not counting the women and children can hear. The Mass is a celebration that includes heaven and earth, so we are never alone at Mass. We celebrate with the Angels and Saints and so we understand that more than 5,000 join us in prayer. The Preface, the prayer before we pray the Holy, Holy, Holy, says it well.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts . . .

In the Gospel, Jesus distributed the loaves and fish with the help of the apostles. At the time for Communion, normally “the faithful, though many, receive from the one bread the Lord’s Body and from the one chalice the Lord’s Blood in the same way that the Apostles received them from the hands of Christ himself” (GIRM 72). When necessary, the priest draws upon a deacon or extraordinary ministers to help in the distribution of Holy Communion.

In the Gospel, all had their fill. According to John, the collected fragments filled twelve wicker baskets. Under the normal celebration of the Mass, we collect the fragments to place in the tabernacle in order to provide for the sick. For the last month, the celebration of the Mass has been anything but usual.

The faithful are at home hearing the Mass through the radio or watching an internet streaming of the Mass. The priest is often alone at the altar, save for those who participate from their homes, and the Saints and Angels who participate from their heavenly home. In the midst of the coronavirus, we are asking the faithful to offer a spiritual communion. The Lord meets us where we are at and becomes our companion on the journey. In the Eucharist, the Lord truly becomes food for us. “Since only the truth can make us free (cf. Jn 8:32), Christ comes for us as the food of truth” (Sacramentum Caritatis #2).

We truly hunger to eat of his Body and thirst to drink of his Blood. We sacrifice our gathering in greater numbers in order to protect life and limit the spread of the virus as we pray for the opportunity to gather again in the future.

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