

## 17<sup>th</sup> Sun OT - John 6:1-15

“Five Barley Loaves and Two Fish”

The **National Eucharistic Revival** sponsored by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops met at Lexington, Kentucky, was enumerated as a gift by four key words: created, fallen, saved and restored.

Bishop John Stowe opened the 13<sup>th</sup> **Annual Assembly of the Association of US Catholic Priests** also in Lexington, Kentucky, explored the dynamics of the Eucharist through an alternate set of terms: taken, blessed, broken and shared.

Here the difference with Bishop John Stowe, that the theme of the assembly was the idea of ***the Eucharist as a participatory rather than a purely devotional experience*** – the Eucharist as a Sacrament of Encounter.

Fr. Driscoll, from the University of Notre Dame, talked about how the Eucharist schools us for action, drawing out the theme of “participatory” as mentioned by Bishop Stowe, as a mystery to be celebrated, believed and lived. Driscoll mentioned that to ignore this inner connection between Eucharist and life is to ***ignore the bond between the life and mission of the church.***

Jesuit Fr. Tom Reese puts it a little more succinctly, that the Eucharistic Revival is more about benediction than celebration of Eucharist with a focus on personal experience rather than mission. To put things back into focus as we experience here at St. Francis de Sales, Kim Harris, assistant professor of African American thought and practice in the Department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, focused on five kinds of testimony or witness to one’s faith: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual. She is a gifted cantor and incorporated music and movement into her presentation.

Her example of the hymn “Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees” was the song of faith and a song of freedom with coded language enslaved people used to communicate with one another. She emphasized that the word Eucharist is a verb. “We need to be revived, we need to be woken up,” she continued. “Be that verb, and then you’ll be able to invite other people to do the same.”

The gospel reading from John is about the Eucharist, "Five barley loaves and two fish," feeding five thousand. This nature miracle is repeated in the other gospels, twice! Matthew adds Jesus saying to the disciples, "Give them some food yourselves!"

I wanted to share with you a response I received from a family who took the time to experience reverent liturgies with a wide variety of musical and cultural styles at different Sunday masses in the area. Obviously they are from the next generation as she describes with parents who want their children to be drawn to the majesty and beauty of the Catholic liturgy as different from the secular world around them and different from the Protestant services at their area megachurches which drew our poorly catechized peers away from the Church. For our kids, we want Sunday Mass to feel and sound unlike anything else they do in their week, because it is there that we encounter Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, and receive Him Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Our Catholic friends and peers know and care about liturgical norms, appropriate musical settings, and reverence for the Eucharist in a way that our parents' generation did not. We see a secular world around us that is broken, and we want our Church to offer a refuge that is radically different from what the world offers, not make Herself more like it.

And then she continues with a list of things they noticed in your liturgy. I didn't respond to the list. Did I mention that she visited our web site and came away with the impression that quote, "Our parish has been in decline for a long time, but if you do hope to revive the parish community, or if you would like to see more young faces in your pews, perhaps it would be worth considering that your liturgy itself may be part of the problem."

How does one respond to such a letter? I simply invited them back, since our greatest treasure is our faith community, the people you rightly judged as aging. But there is more to our community than meets the eye, and that is precisely the weakness of your standards of judgment. You judge the book by its cover, which I think is beautiful.