

Proper 13 A 2020

Isaiah 55:1-5

Psalm 145:8-9, 15-22

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:13-21

No bread, no wine, no altar.

All alone in the remotest barrens of the earth,  
The French Jesuit,  
Mystic and scientist Teilhard de Chardin  
Was prevented from celebrating the eucharist.

Within that experience of loss and longing,  
He found a priceless treasure.  
He discovered the holiness of all creation,  
And brought forth a new prayer,  
Which he called the Hymn of the Universe.

It begins with The Mass on the World.

He says, in part:

*Since once again, Lord ... I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I... will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world...*

*My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day...*

*All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die: all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire...*

*Receive, O Lord, this all-embracing host which your whole creation, moved by your magnetism, offers you at this dawn of a new day.*

*This bread, our toil, is of itself, I know, but an immense fragmentation; this wine, our pain, is no more, I know, than a draught that dissolves. Yet in the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted — and this I am sure of, for I sense it — a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike:*

*'Lord, make us one.'* \*

No bread, no wine, no altar,

And still, a prayer to make us one.

No bread, no wine, no altar,  
And still Teilhard discovered all he needed  
To make the act of thanksgiving  
In which we offer the matter of our lives,  
See it taken, blessed, broken, and shared –  
And in that breaking and sharing,  
Know that we are one.

Teilhard did not choose to refrain from the eucharist,  
Nor have we.  
In this season without bread and wine,  
Some of us are impatient,  
Some are sad,  
Some irritated,  
And for some,  
The waiting does not seem long or hard.

What I wonder is this:  
Can we, in this time,  
Like Teilhard,  
Discover some new gift,  
Some new way of engaging with the world,  
Some new freedom for the world and for each other?

Could the gospel we are given for today,  
The well-loved story of the loaves and fishes,  
Which may at first seem so ironic,  
Actually offer us some glimpse of a way beyond,  
Beyond the experience of loss and longing  
Into a true celebration?

In today's story,  
Jesus feeds a multitude  
When it seemed there was nothing to share.  
Through all the centuries,  
We have understood this story,  
This experience of the limitless abundance of God's gift,  
As a first sign of the gift Jesus will offer at the Last Supper.

The eucharistic elements are unmistakable.

So how do we hear this story now,

In this season when the eucharist is withheld from us?  
Because surely, there is still a gift in this story,  
A story of blessing and abundance.  
How do we find it?

One way into the story, perhaps,  
Is to start with what is so familiar to us  
In these days:  
Scattering. Dispersal. Separation.

Scattering and gathering  
Are always part of the story of the people of God.  
For us,  
they are inescapable right now.  
Mostly the scattering part.

And yet, even though we are separated,  
The promise is that we are gathered.  
We are still one.  
Even without the sign and symbol,  
The living truth of the eucharist,  
We are one.

We are one because Jesus still has compassion on us,  
And finding us harassed and helpless,  
Like sheep without a shepherd,  
He gathers us in.

He commanded the disciples  
To bring what they had,  
So he could make something out of almost nothing.  
And there was enough, and more than enough,  
For everyone.  
Just so he will invite us  
To make something out of what we experience as lack.

Look at the story again.  
Jesus does not tell the disciples where to find what they need.  
They have to look around,  
And see what they have.  
He makes it sufficient,  
But they have to offer it.

On their own,  
The disciples wanted to scatter the crowd.  
Send them away,

They beg Jesus.  
They think they are doing a kindness.  
There is nothing to eat;  
They cannot help.  
The only thing to do is go away.

This is a failure of leadership,  
A failure of hope,  
A lack of faith.  
They don't believe they –  
Or Jesus –  
Have anything to offer.  
So they say,  
Go away;  
Fend for yourselves.

To me, at least,  
This sounds like the spectacular failures of leadership  
We see all around us  
In the midst of our current crisis.  
Go away and fend for yourselves,  
The President says to the governors.  
Find your own scarce medical equipment.

Go away and fend for yourselves.  
Make your own decisions about how to handle the crisis,  
And take the blame if they fail.

Or, in front of our own Capitol,  
We say to those sheltering in the homeless encampment,  
Go away and fend for yourselves.

But before we get gleeful  
About finding the faults of others  
In this gospel story,  
Perhaps we might wonder about ourselves.

When and where,  
Often with the best of intentions,  
Do we tell people to go away and fend for themselves?

What does it look like when we doubt?  
When, with the best of intentions,  
Do we take a cautious route,  
Withdraw from each other,  
Scatter?

Do we believe we have nothing to offer?

Can we not believe that God will hallow what we bring  
And make it into blessing?  
God could make a sacrament out of anything  
In this whole created world.

Teilhard found a limitless resource –  
The entire earth,  
Its suffering and its beauty,  
Its flourishing and dying –  
With which to make offering,  
On the altar of the world.  
Just so we can discover  
What we have to bring,  
And trust that God will transform it into abundance.

All we have to bring, in truth,  
Is ourselves.

What do we have, right now?  
Not so much of the triumph of the world,  
And far more of the pain, the suffering,  
The anger and fear  
And doubt and even shame.  
Can even those be transformed?

What will we bring,  
We in this community of St. Andrew's,  
Scattered and yet still gathered?  
We have no bread, no wine, no altar,  
But we have our hopes,  
Our vision, as well as our shortcomings  
And our flaws.

We have a vision, concrete and immediate,  
Of deeper connection with those around us,  
Connection that goes beyond traditional service  
To the risky embrace of advocacy,  
And the search for justice.  
We have a vision,  
Concrete and immediate,  
Of creating a new kind of sanctuary on our grounds.  
A place for the flourishing of human beings  
And of all creation.

We have a vision,  
far off yet ever present,  
Of a world healed and whole,  
A commonwealth of love and justice.

What will we bring that will be enough  
To set the miracle in motion?

Bring them here to me, says Jesus.  
Gather what was scattered.

We have believed, through all our generations,  
That we gather what is scattered  
At the table in our midst.

What can we discover,  
In this lonely wider world?

God is always waiting to transform what we bring.  
Our task is to bring what we have,  
And let God do the rest.

Jesus, in coming among us as one of us,  
Sanctifies all life,  
Its suffering and its beauty,  
Its triumphs and catastrophes.  
In every action,  
Of healing and forgiving,  
Teaching and feeding,  
He gathers us into one body.

Bring them here to me,  
He says to the disciples.

Bring them to receive what little you have found.  
Blessed, broken, and shared in love,  
It will turn out to be more than enough.

\*From "The Mass on the World," in *The Heart of Matter*. For the full text of this chapter, see [The Mass On The World.pdf](#)