**Sermon on the Miracle of the 5000**

Up until this time we have been hearing gospel lessons of healing the sick, the lame and the blind and a few parables in between. Today, we hear a miracle of a different sort that doesn’t involve infirm people. This miracle has two important parts: the first is what constitutes the church and the second how do understand the message contained in the miracle?

The miracle of the 5 loaves and 2 fish is the first glimpse of the church as we know it. The Greek word for the church is *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* essentially means a meeting or assembly of congregants. It does not refer to the structure or the building itself, but rather it refers to the people inside that building and their interactions within the 4 walls that encase them. The *ekklesia* or the assembly was carried over from ancient times, when ancient Greeks would gather for conducting public business and for considering affairs proposed by the council.

The gospel tells us that there were people who were following Christ from town to town, listening to his wisdom and observing his healings. Even though there was no building on a fixed foundation for them to use, these 5000 were the church at the time. There was no fixed tent, everyone moved around to hear the word and deeds of Christ.

We often think that in order to have church with services we need to have a structure and that the ground must be consecrated for it to be a church, but it is further from the truth. All we need is an *antimension* with relics. As we all know, our liturgy this morning is not contained within a structure thus resembling more like the feeding of the 5000 on a hill.

We might even recall Billy Graham’s crusade. His early preaching went from tent to tent, building to building, radio to radio and television to television. The building wasn’t required and look how his message spread and how he amassed thousands of converts. Very similar to Christ I would say

The gospel also gives us the first glimpse of the Eucharistic celebration in the church. In its primitive form, the lesson tells us that our Lord takes bread, blesses it and raises it up to heaven before he distributes it to the 5000. The words of institution said by Christ on Holy Thursday at the Last Supper, begins a structured formula. From this very simple act of our Lord, the Eucharistic celebration has grown over the years to an hour-long event composed of litanies, hymns, readings and a homily. This points to the time associated with the celebration of the liturgy. According to Fr. Alexander Schmemann the Eucharist is beyond time. We cannot say a 2-hour liturgy is too long or a 40-minute liturgy is too short. It is outside of time. The liturgy sanctifies all things including time so it is outside a fixed schedule.

We should also remember that it was by the breaking of the bread that the two disciples recognized the Lord at Emmaus. The miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves, then, foreshadows the miracle of the Eucharist, the “multiplication” of Christ Himself throughout the centuries. And as five loaves fed five thousand men, so the faith of a few men has fed thousands of thousands throughout the world.

The gospel tells us that after the distribution they were satisfied. In other words, they were not famished, their bellies were full. The apostles also drew up 12 baskets of fragments. The fathers of the church explain that the consecrated bread was for the 5000 who believed and the fragments are for those who have yet come to believe in the Lord.

How do we try to understand this miracle when there were only 5 loaves and 2 fish for 5000 people? Were the loaves as big as camels and the fish big as whales? Probably not. It is not for the rational mind to explain how this miracle occurred but rather the rational mind needs to understand the message contained in the miracle. Amen.