

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B '18

2 Kings 4:42-44/Ephesians 4:1-6/John 6:1-15

SET YOUR SIGHT ON GREATER HORIZONS



The summer moon in the night sky the past couple evenings has been glorious. I don't often enough look up at the night sky to appreciate its beauty and grandeur – the myriad stars and the bright moon. On July 20, 1969, American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin took their historic first steps on the surface of the moon. For three hours they did experiments, picked up bits of moon dirt and rocks, placed an American flag on the moon's surface and left a sign etched with the day's date and these words: *We came in peace for all mankind*. I thought of that moment as I gazed at the moon Thursday night. I also thought of Dr. Ron Olowin, our parishioner and friend who died about a year ago. Ron was a professor of Astronomy and Physics at St. Mary's College and he shared his love of the cosmos with many of us. That momentous adventure of walking on the moon nearly fifty years ago was a turning point for the human race as the United States led the effort for exploring outer space and opened the door for further space exploration.

Another first took place just before those two astronauts climbed out of the lunar module Eagle and set foot on the moon. It was kept quiet at the time by NASA: *Communion was celebrated on the moon*. Two Sundays before the launch of Apollo 11, Aldrin participated in a Communion service at his Presbyterian church. During the service, a small piece of

the communion bread and a small chalice of wine were sealed in plastic packets. The packets were safely stowed in Aldrin's personal preference kit. When the lunar module touched down on the moon, Aldrin took out the communion elements and set them out in front of the guidance-system computer. He then radioed to Houston: *"Houston, this is Eagle. This is the Lunar Module pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, wherever or wherever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the last few hours, and to give thanks in his own individual way."*



Next came the moment of Communion. Aldrin writes in his autobiography:

"I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements . . . Just before I partook of the elements, I read the words which I had chosen to indicate our trust that as man probes into space, we are in fact acting in Christ. I sensed especially strongly my unity with our church back home, and with the Church everywhere . . . I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two

young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. I read: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."

Bread blessed and broken on the surface of the moon . . . bread blessed and broken on a Palestinian hillside centuries ago . . . bread blessed and broken here in our own outdoor cathedral: bread blessed and broken uniting all humankind into a community transcending time and space, a community of thanksgiving to the God who gives and sustains every molecule of life. The Gospel readings over the next few Sundays will invite us to consider the deeper meanings of Eucharist: Christ, the bread of life, present to us in this sacrament that is given to us in order that we might become sacrament for one another.



Eucharist is possible only when self defers to community, only when serving others is exalted over being served, only when differences dissolve, prejudices give way to understanding, and the common and shared are given priority. The Eucharist demands more than the opening of our hands to take and our mouths to eat; it demands that we open our hearts and spirits as well so that we may become what we receive.

It's inspirational to me that an astronaut, a man of science, would have had such profound faith that he would not

carry out the most significant event of his life without the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, being present to him. How present to you and me is the Eucharist when we leave this gathering? Do you think about the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ you have received today as the week progresses? When you're in the midst of an argument with your spouse or your children, would it help to remember that here in the Eucharist you have taken within yourself the one who could forgive his enemies even from the cross? who embraced the children even when everyone else was scooting them away? who loved to the end even his closest friends who betrayed him?

When you're feeling like you're at the end of your ropes, stretched to the limit and have no more energy or time left to give, do you ever think of the little boy in today's gospel who didn't have much – only five barley loaves and two fish – yet gladly offered it to Jesus who blessed and multiplied it, making it more than enough to satisfy others? When you're ranting at God because you feel shortchanged, that life has been unfair to you and that you drew the short end of the stick, could the Spirit of Christ, living within you through the Eucharist, be a profound reminder of the abundant blessings that God has given you? With twelve baskets left over?



The next four weeks of passages from the Gospel of John will provide us with an excellent opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist in our lives. The Church has called the Eucharist the “source and summit” of our Christian living. Everything about our faith flows from it and everything returns to it. We celebrate the Eucharist with great joy and enthusiasm; you can feel it as people gather together each week for Mass. We also share the Eucharist with profound reverence and respect because something very special and significant happens here. That’s the reason the church recommends that when we approach the altar to share Communion we pause to make a brief bow of the head before extending our hands to receive the bread and the cup. It’s a physical gesture that can help to remind us what we are about. This isn’t the drive-through experience at MacDonald’s, nor the eat-and-run meal that controls our lives most days of the week. This is the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the foretaste of the Eternal Banquet, the meal that allows us to share in the very life of Jesus who is broken and poured out for us. This is the food that nourishes us for the week ahead.



We don’t have to go to the moon to be awed by the Eucharist. Right here, around this Table, we are united with all creation, with the Church throughout the world and with one another. The very life of Christ becomes our life. The adventure of

faith can take us to the outer limits of the universe, even as it nourishes us to live here on earth. From this simple morsel of bread, from this tiny sip of wine, we all share the very life of God, and like the miracle of Jesus on the hillside of Galilee, there are plenty of leftovers. Take some of the leftovers of the Eucharist home with you today – the leftovers named by St. Paul: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another through love, unity and the bond of peace. The Lord will provide you with plenty for yourself and enough to share with others.

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