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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
25 July 2009

The Seventeenth Sunday of the Year (B)

Today, the Psalmist sings, "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs" (Psalm 145:16). How is it that the Lord feeds us? He does so through the ministry of Bishops.

The Lord Jesus today tells the Apostles, "Have the people recline" on the "great deal of grass in that place" (John 6:10). The ancient hearers of the Gospel would have recognized an obvious allusion to Psalm 23, which we sang last week: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:1-2). What is more, King David further sings of this Shepherd, "You prepare a table before me" (Psalm 23:5). This Shepherd feeds his sheep and he does so with his own Body and Blood.

We might well ask how Jesus distributed the loaves and fish to more than five thousand people in a timely manner. Saint Matthew provides us the answer; Mark and Luke also agree with him. It is a detail that for one reason or another John has omitted. After the Lord blessed and broke the bread and fish, Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus gave them "to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds" (Matthew 14:19). The four Evangelists all agree that all were satisfied, that all had

eaten their fill as in the days of the prophet of Elisha (cf. II Kings 4:44).

The Lord fed the multitude through the hands of the Apostles. He continues to feed us in the same way to this day, for when he instituted the Eucharist on the night he was betrayed, he commanded the Apostles, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

Through his prophet Jeremiah, the Lord God promised, "And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15).

Jesus fulfilled this promise when he called the Twelve to himself and sent them out in his name to continue his ministry after he ascended to the Father. For this reason he said to them when he breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and gave them the authority to forgive sins, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). He also said to them, "Whoever receives you receives me" (Matthew 10:40).

This ministry they received from the Lord, the Apostles entrusted to certain men after them through the laying on of hands that the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ would be brought to every corner of the world in every age. We refer to this as the Apostolic Succession, the ministry of Bishops that they share with priests and deacons.

With Wednesday's installation of Archbishop Lucas as the Archbishop of Omaha, we find ourselves here in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois without a Bishop and our hearts cry out to the Lord for a shepherd after his own heart who will feed us and teach us.

The Bishop is more than the boss or Chief Executive Officer of the Diocese. He is our brother in the faith and our father in Christ. It is he who maintains our communion with the Bishop of Rome and it is he who leads us on the way to Jesus Christ.

The ministry of a Bishop is essential to the life of the Church for it is the Bishop who, as the successor to the Apostles, takes "the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd, and priest, and act[s] as his representative."¹ As Christ is the head of his Body, the Church, so is the Bishop the head of his Diocese, standing in the place of Christ the Head. In this way, the Bishop can make the words of Saint Paul his own:

I ... urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

It is the task of the Bishop to take up the ministry of Christ, the Good Shepherd, to guide, protect and feed the sheep entrusted to his care.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 21.

The Bishop guides us as our teacher in the ways of faith. It is he who is the authoritative teacher in his Diocese to ensure that what is taught is the authentic faith of the Church, which we have received from the Apostles.

The Bishop protects his sheep by the help of his prayers and through his sacramental ministry. The ministry of the Bishop, according to the teaching of Saint Paul, sanctifies us and makes us acceptable to the Lord (cf. Romans 15:15-16).

The Bishop feeds his sheep by offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass in which we receive the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To assist him in his ministry, every Bishop appoints priests - presbyters - to stand in his place throughout his Diocese. Every priest receives his ministry from the Bishop and without his permission he may not minister.

We see how essential the ministry of the Bishop is for the life of the Church. Let each of us, then, raise our prayers to heaven, remembering the words of the Psalmist: "They eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season" (Psalm 145:15). Let us implore the Lord for the gift of a new Bishop that we might be fed both at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist.

Until such time, we must await the decision of Pope Benedict XVI who will personally choose the man who is to be our

Bishop. It is a decision that must be carefully made because of the dignity of the office. Saint Paul instructs Timothy, whom the Apostle himself ordained (cf. II Timothy 1:6), "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (I Timothy 5:22).

In the meantime, the College of Consulters has elected the Reverend Monsignor Carl Kemme, a son beloved son of this parish, to be the Diocesan Administrator until such time as a new Bishop comes to take possession of the Diocese. As we pray for a new Bishop, let us also pray for Msgr. Kemme who will now see to the day-to-day affairs of the Diocese.

Let each of us lift our eyes hopefully to the Lord, begging him to give us soon a shepherd after his own heart that through his ministry he may feed us and answer all our needs. Amen.