

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)

July 27, 2003 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

“Company’s coming tonight!”

What do we think of when we hear that phrase? I guess most of us think that “someone special” is coming to visit, perhaps coming over for dinner. Maybe it even means we’ll eat at the dining room table and use the “good china.” It sort of brings to mind the idea that it’s a special occasion when company comes, doesn’t it?

Sometimes old friends say, “Oh, I’m not ‘company’ – I’m just one of the family” – as if being “company” was somehow not as close to the heart as old friends or family.

That word – “company” – what does it mean? It must be related to “companion.”

Those of you who know me know that I love words – I love to play with words, take ‘em apart and see what’s inside them, explore their meaning, find out where they came from, what words they’re related to.

Now, I’m not a Latin scholar – if Monsignor Kleiser were alive, he would certainly testify to that. He tried to teach me Latin in high school – without much success, I’m afraid. It wasn’t until much later that I figured out that you need to know at least a little Latin to understand English.

So – “company” – “companion” – where do those words come from?

Well, the word “companion” comes from two Latin words –

The Latin “com” or “cum” – meaning “together” or “with” or “beside” or “next to,” . . .

And the “-panion” part comes from the Latin word “panis,” meaning bread. Remember the old hymn “Panis Angelicus” – “Bread of Angels?” And a “pantry” is where we keep our bread, isn’t it?

So – “com” – together – “-panion” – bread. The word “com-panion” means, essentially, “Together-Bread.” A companion is someone with whom we share bread – someone we’d share a meal with – a traveling companion, maybe.

A “company” is a group of “companions,” isn’t it? One meaning of “company” is a military unit – a group of people who would eat together as messmates, to share bread.

Even a “company” in the sense of a commercial enterprise is a group of people who gather together to share “bread” of a different kind.

And that’s who and what we are here, isn’t it? “Companions” who have gathered together – as a “company” – to share a meal – to break bread together. We share the “Together-Bread” of the Eucharist.

MOVE

Today, we’re beginning a series of homilies on the Mass. As it turned out, we picked an opportune set of readings to begin with, too – about people being fed with bread from Heaven.

That’s why we’re talking a little about “the Assembly” today – this “company,” this group of “companions” – who are gathered here today.

A lot of us remember when it wasn’t like this. We sat or knelt or stood quietly in our pews. Sometimes said the rosary while Mass was going on. We often had little contact with what was going on at the altar. And we probably had less contact with each other.

Then the Second Vatican Council called for the “full, conscious, and active participation” of all the faithful in the Liturgy. We can’t really have “conscious participation” without some knowledge of what’s going on, and that’s the purpose of this series of homilies – it’s the purpose of all homilies, really.

The purpose of a homily is not to teach, in the sense of imparting information – it’s to preach, in the sense of helping the assembled believers to celebrate more deeply and more fully.

A lot of things changed after Vatican II. We participate more fully and actively, not just as spectators. We all make the verbal responses that were previously mumbled in Latin by altar boys who usually didn't know what they were saying.

Now we stand to receive the Eucharist – instead of kneeling at the communion rail. And we mostly receive the Eucharist in our own hands. We also receive the cup, where we never did before.

Of course, some of the urgencies of life can make it more difficult to be fully a part of the community. We rush in, maybe we're late – and I am, too (I know, I know, in Memphis, if you're there before it's over, you're not late).

We probably have a lot of other things on our minds, a long list of things to do after Church. By the time we settle down and focus and realize where we are, the first reading has probably passed over our heads.

Then the homily (time to balance the checkbook – that's one reason we don't give out the bulletins before Mass), then the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Then communion, then out the door to beat the rush out of the parking lot. For a lot of us, no time to stop and talk, no time to meet anyone new, don't make eye contact, maybe no one will stop us. Got things to do!

MOVE

What's wrong with that picture? What is it that we come here to do? We're supposed to be gathering as an assembly – as a company, as companions – around a book and a table. We share bread together – beginning with the spiritual nourishment of the Scriptures, then with the food of the Eucharist. We are companions!

We are companions! We gather together, we talk to each other, we reach out our hands to each other, we sing with each other, we participate in the action.

In the “olden days,” we used to talk about “going to Mass” or “attending Mass.” Sometimes we talked about “assisting at Mass” – that was a little better.

But what we're really doing is celebrating together – “concelebrating.” If we're not doing that, we're not really a company of companions – we're just a bunch of individuals who happened to come to the same place at the same time. We do this together – maybe not easy, but necessary.

MOVE

See, every person here is needed here. Not just the Presider, or the deacon, or the lector, or the altar servers, or the Eucharistic ministers, or the ushers. Everyone is needed here to participate in the liturgy. If you're not here, who's going to do your job?

Some people say they don't need to go to church – they can pray and worship God in other ways.

That always reminds me of the old “homily story” about the pastor who was visiting one of the families in his parish. After dinner, he and the husband went off to sit by the fire and talk. The wife and kids always went to church, but the husband seldom did. The pastor made mention of that.

The husband responded that he just wasn't comfortable in that stuffy old church. He really didn't know anyone there, and besides, he could worship God a lot better out on the lake by himself, fishing, in the midst the beauties of God's creation.

The pastor picked up the fireplace tongs and picked up a glowing coal out of the fire. He laid it on the hearth by itself, separated from the rest of the fire. As the fire continued to burn brightly, the single coal – separated from the rest – lost its glow, turned dark, and went out – just a cold cinder. But the fire still burned as before.

The two of them contemplated this scene for a moment. Then the husband said, “I'll see you in church on Sunday, pastor.”

We all need each other. At the core of our belief is our unity as the body of Christ. Everyone here is important, and is here for a reason. One reason we are here is to put aside our “alone-ness” – to be part of a community, to be companions for each other – to help prevent each other's fire from going out – to help keep our own fire from going out.

We're fortunate here at Holy Spirit – we can look around and see the faces of our companions. I think that gives us more of a sense of community than we might otherwise have.

MOVE

You may recall that this is “Cycle B” in the Lectionary. We've been reading mostly from Mark's Gospel since we began Ordinary Time back in January. We heard from the other Evangelists during Lent and Easter, but now we're back in Ordinary Time and will be hearing mostly from Mark for a while.

But today, we put Mark on hold again. John doesn't have his own Lectionary cycle, so we hear from him from time to time during the other cycles.

For the next several Sundays, we'll be reading through the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John – the “Bread of Life” discourse. Today we hear the first fifteen verses, the familiar story of the loaves and the fishes.

Notice how the first reading from 2nd Kings sort of sets the stage – Elisha takes twenty barley loaves, and feeds a hundred people – with some left over.

Now, I always liked Elisha. You remember him – some naughty little children made fun of his bald head, and a couple of bears came out of the woods and ate the children. But I digress.

Elisha feeds the assembled people through the power of God. Then we hear Jesus do almost the same thing, but this time it's five loaves and two fish, feeding five thousand people – with plenty left over.

The hand of the Lord feeds us – he answers all our needs. And that's sort of the bottom line of why we gather here. We are fed with Scripture and Eucharist. We are “companions.”

It seems to me that “church” isn't really what we do when we're not doing something else – we don't come here and become companions for an hour, then go back to the “real world.” I think that other world out there is what we do when we're not here. We're companions all the time – 24/7 – even

when we're "out there." That's where we are temporarily, when we're not here. But we're companions all the time.

In a sense, we are no longer a "group," no longer individuals – we are companions – one Assembly, one community, one company. One bread, one body, one people – no longer individuals, but one body – and that companionship, that "shared bread," doesn't end just because we walk out the front door of the church.

CONCLUSION

The next few weeks, we'll hear homilies about other aspects of the Mass – the "Gathering Rite" – the Liturgy of the Word – the Liturgy of the Eucharist – how and why we sing – what postures we adopt, and why – how and when we move, and why – and the "objects" we use. And how we are all brought together as "companions."

READINGS

Reading I

2 Kgs 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, and fresh grain in the ear. Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat." But his servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat." "For thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'" And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

R (cf. 16) The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Let all your works give you thanks, O Lord,
and let your faithful ones bless you.
Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might.

R The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you,
and you give them their food in due season;
you open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

R The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The Lord is just in all his ways
and holy in all his works.
The Lord is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.

R The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Reading II

Eph 4:1-6

Brothers and sisters:
I, a prisoner for the Lord,
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:

one body and one Spirit,
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Gospel

Jn 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee.
A large crowd followed him,
because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick.
Jesus went up on the mountain,
and there he sat down with his disciples.
The Jewish feast of Passover was near.
When Jesus raised his eyes
and saw that a large crowd was coming to him,
he said to Philip,
"Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"
He said this to test him,
because he himself knew what he was going to do.
Philip answered him,
"Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough
for each of them to have a little."
One of his disciples,
Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish;
but what good are these for so many?"
Jesus said, "Have the people recline."
Now there was a great deal of grass in that place.
So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.
Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,
and distributed them to those who were reclining,
and also as much of the fish as they wanted.
When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples,
"Gather the fragments left over,
so that nothing will be wasted."
So they collected them,
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments
from the five barley loaves
that had been more than they could eat.
When the people saw the sign he had done, they said,
"This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."
Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off
to make him king,
he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

