

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

#### Psalm 144 (145)

Some scholars think that this psalm was once the last in the entire book, and that five other psalms to the glory of God were added later on.

Its structure is unusual. The first word of each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from the first to the last. This device was used to help memorise the text, for private or public recitation. It also expresses total fullness, rather like an 'A-to-Z' of praise. Texts like these, called acrostics, were the work of highly skilled artists.

The psalmist praises a God whose attributes he is keen to summarise and extol. He addresses a God whom he acknowledges both as King (*the glory of your reign*) and as an attentive, loving parent (*just, loving, close, granting the desires of all*).

God is also the one who provides us with food. Indeed, the second stanza has often been used in monasteries and places of learning as a grace before meals. Our food, whether to keep us physically well, or spiritually healthy in the Eucharist, is always a gift from God.

In the last verse of this week's psalm there is also an indication of the type of prayer pleasing to God. It is one which comes '*from the heart*'.



## Gospel John 6: 1–15

Today and for the next five weeks, the Lectionary puts Mark aside for a while and focuses on the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel. This chapter, which begins with Jesus feeding the 5000, will lead us to reflect on the Bread of Life. This same story is also told in the other three Gospels with slight variations.

In John's Gospel, miracles are referred to as 'signs'; there are seven in all, of which today's is the fourth. Each sign tells us more about who Jesus is and clearly indicates God's presence at work amongst the people.

There are several parallels between this story and the Exodus episode of Moses, with the feeding of the Israelites in the desert.

**The hillside** evokes Mount Sinai, and the **questions and answers** between Philip and Jesus recall the exchange between God and Moses on a similar subject (Numbers 11: 13–23).

There are also other feeding miracles in the Old Testament, as today's first reading demonstrates (2 Kings 4: 42–44).

#### **The Sea of Galilee – or of Tiberias**

In the New Testament the Palestine lakes are called 'seas'. John seems keen to locate the exact place of the feeding, so he mentions Tiberias, a town on the western shore of the lake, named after the Roman Emperor Tiberius.

#### **200 denarii**

One denarius corresponds to a day's wages.

#### **Five barley loaves**

Barley flour was much cheaper than wheat and was used by poor people.

#### **Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and gave them out**

The language here is very Eucharistic.

#### **This really is the Prophet who is to come**

A prophet/Messiah had been expected by the Jews. Many thought it would be Elijah, whose return had been promised before the end of time (Malachi 4: 5).

#### **They wanted to make him King**

The true nature of Jesus's kingship will be revealed at his trial before Pilate (John 18: 36).