

Readings: *Genesis 14: 18 – 20; Psalm 109 (110); Luke 9: 11 – 17.*

Today's readings illustrate the depth of the Church's conviction that the Eucharist is the centre of the life of Christians. From the Old Testament, from the letters of Saint Paul and from the Gospels the lectionary draws different aspects of the Church's understanding about the Holy Sacrament.

The second reading contains the earliest account of the institution of the Eucharist. Paul wrote his first letter to the Church in Corinth in about AD 57 – less than thirty years after the Last Supper.

The passage is one of two in which Paul appeals to *what I received from the Lord and in turn passed on to you*: the other is his account of the death, burial and resurrection appearances of Christ. So the Eucharist joins these central events in the tradition which creates the Church. It gives expression in action to what the Creeds express in words – the central truths of our faith.

As the Church grew in numbers and in its understanding of its faith teachers looked to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for events and teachings which would enrich the devotion of Christians.

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the few events before the Passion of Christ which is recounted in all four Gospels, and we see this miraculous feeding of a huge crowd with physical bread as a foretaste of the feeding of millions of Christians with the sacramental bread and wine of the Eucharist. In his account of the feeding Luke uses words which are used in accounts of the Last Supper, echoed in meals after the Resurrection, and repeated in our Eucharistic Prayers: *He took – he raised his eyes to heaven – he said the blessing – he broke – he gave*. So there is an unbroken link between the earthly ministry of Christ and each celebration of the Eucharist by the Church in every time and place.

Christian teachers also found Old Testament passages which could be seen as foreshadowings of the Eucharist. The Psalm we use today had already been understood by New Testament writers to speak of Christ as the Messiah (see *Acts 2: 34 – 36*) and as the eternal High Priest (see *Hebrews, especially 5: 5 – 10*). Today's reading from Genesis leads us to see the bread and wine offered by the king and priest Melchizedek as a particular foreshadowing of the sacramental food which Christ, our king and priest, offers us today.