

- On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, not too far from the ruins of the ancient city of Capernaum, is an area known as Tabgha. Christian tradition holds that this is a place that our Lord often visited for the beauty and solitude it provided.
- It is also the site of today's Gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. In fact, there is a church and Benedictine monastery in Tabgha that mark the spot of where this miracle took place.
- The current church, which was built in 1982, was built on the site of a 4<sup>th</sup> century church that was destroyed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century during the Persian invasion of the Holy Land.
- While the church and monastery in Tabgha are quite beautiful, what is most interesting is the rock jutting out of the floor over which the altar is built. Tradition holds that it was on this rock that Jesus laid the 2 fish and 5 loaves that were multiplied to feed the hungry crowds.
- Directly in front of the rock and the altar is a famous mosaic from the original 4<sup>th</sup> century church that depicts two fish and a basket with four loaves of bread in it. You'll remember, however, that today's Gospel story mentions five loaves of bread.
- The fifth loaf is represented by the Eucharistic bread that is confectioned upon the altar at Mass and that is broken and shared, just as the bread in today's Gospel story was broken and shared amongst the people.
- So as this beautiful 4<sup>th</sup> century mosaic indicates, today's miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is a foreshadowing of the miracle of the Eucharist.
- In fact, if we were to keep reading in the Gospel of John, we find that today's Gospel story leads us into St. John's famous Discourse on the Bread of Life, which is the scriptural basis of the Church's teaching on the Eucharist.
- Today, and for the next 4 Sundays, we will be reading from the Bread of Life Discourse as our Gospel. As such, this is a great time for us to really focus on the Eucharist.
- The Bread of Life Discourse from John's Gospel is one of my favorite passages from Scripture for many reasons. One of the things that I appreciate about this passage is that when you study it, it becomes absolutely undeniable that this passage is about the Eucharist.
- In the weeks to come, as we read through this discourse, we'll hear Our Lord speaking about eating His body and drinking His blood, and He's not using symbolic language. Jesus is clearly telling us about His real presence in the Eucharist.
- For as we all know and believe as Catholics, the Eucharist is not merely bread and wine that symbolize Jesus. Through the power of the Mass, the bread and wine become really and truly Our Lord's body, blood, soul, and divinity.
- Furthermore, in writing this passage, St. John makes some very clear connections between this miracle that takes place in Tabgha, and the Last Supper, when Jesus institutes the Eucharist.
- For example, today's Gospel records Jesus and His disciples sitting down on a mountain, while at the Last Supper our Lord and His apostles are seated atop Mt. Zion in the Upper Room, which you can still visit today.
- Notice as well that it's mentioned that this miracle takes place at Passover, which is also when the Last Supper occurs.
- Then, when He is ready to perform the miracle, Jesus tells the people to recline – to lie down. The only other time that St. John uses this verb in his Gospel is in reference to the Last

Supper, when he speaks of Jesus reclining at table after washing the apostles' feet, and when John himself reclines against Jesus' chest to ask who His betrayer will be.

- To further underscore the connection between today's miracle and the Last Supper, St. John uses the same words to describe the multiplication of the loaves that occur in the Last Supper and Eucharistic Institution narratives of the other Gospels: take, bread, give thanks, and distribute. This is not a coincidence! John did this on purpose!
- The point here is that, if we take the Sacred Scriptures truly to be the inerrant Word of God, then there's no reason ever to doubt the Church's teaching on the Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, because it's so clearly laid out here in the Bread of Life Discourse!
- And if the Eucharist is really and truly our Lord's body, blood, soul, and divinity as the Church teaches it is, then we must give great thought to how we should live our lives so as to be well prepared to receive It.
- This is where we can take a cue from today's epistle from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which speaks of the unity we should all strive for as Christians. Of course, in our Catholic understanding, we see the Eucharist as one of the great signs of unity in the Church.
- In other words, when we receive Holy Communion, we are signifying by this action that we are in union with the Holy Catholic Church: that we believe and hold as our own all that the Church teaches and proposes for our belief.
- And yet, we are also called to be in union with one another, that we are not withholding forgiveness from someone who has hurt us.
- This is why St. Paul tells us to *live in a manner worthy of the call [we] 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....*
- We must seek out this unity because there is only *one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all*. And the task of the Christian is to be perfectly united to our Lord and His Church in this life so that we can be assured of our eternal union with our Lord in Heaven.
- To help us in this task of growing in perfection, our Lord gives us the Eucharist, by which we are nourished and strengthened – but only if we receive it worthily and with integrity, and if we are indeed striving to living in a manner worthy of our call as Christians.
- You see, the Eucharist is not a magic pill that works without our effort. To receive the benefits of so marvelous a gift, we must receive it with faith in what the Church teaches, hope in God's mercy, and with a ready charity that we practice with everyone.
- We must receive Holy Communion with great attention and reverence, and never thoughtlessly. Moreover, we must only receive the Eucharist if we are sure we're in a state of grace, for if we are in mortal sin, we are not in union with our Lord – and therefore any partaking of the Eucharist in that state would make us liars and greatly offend our Lord.
- Brothers and sisters, we are so blessed to be Catholic and to have available to us the gift of the Eucharist, by which we receive our Lord's body, blood, soul, and divinity.
- May we believe wholeheartedly in this great gift and strive to receive it with integrity and deep reverence. And through the grace we receive in the Eucharist, may we each come to live truly in a manner worthy of our Christian dignity.