



"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, (Jesus) said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds" (Mt 14:19).

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 3rd , 2014

First Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
 listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.

Responsorial Psalm: 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18

Lector: ⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
All: slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Lector: ⁹ The Lord is good to all,
All: and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Lector: ¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
All: and all your faithful shall bless you.
Lector: ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
All: and tell of your power,
Lector: ¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
All: and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Lector: ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
All: and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Lector: The Lord is faithful in all his words,
All: and gracious in all his deeds.
Lector: ¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling,
All: and raises up all who are bowed down.
Lector: ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
All: and you give them their food in due season.
Lector: ¹⁶ You open your hand,
All: satisfying the desire of every living thing.
Lector: ¹⁷ The Lord is just in all his ways,
All: and kind in all his doings.
Lector: ¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
All: to all who call on him in truth.

Second Reading: Romans 8:35, 37-39

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁶As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹

⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'

¹⁶Jesus said to them, '***They need not go away; you give them something to eat.***'

¹⁷They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.'

¹⁸And he said, '***Bring them here to me.***'

¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Homily

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is one that is familiar to most of us, having heard it a hundred times in any Christian church which we may have attended in our lifetimes. What is new for us here? As we are no longer children, let us dig a little deeper, explore a few more layers. The feeding of a multitude occurs six times across the four Gospels,¹ which indicates that it was an extremely important teaching in the early church, and as those of us in the sacramental traditions believe, the story was also important due to its connection with the Eucharist. In the earliest church, the origin of the Eucharist was not conceptualized exclusively in the Last Supper, but if you look at all the stories about meals, you will see they put as much emphasis on Jesus' eating with his disciples in Galilee and the post-resurrection meals. The meals were not strictly bread and wine, but fish was a common component. We have often associated the traditional Eucharistic meal with Jewish Passover, but in the Gospel of Matthew, there is no mention of Passover, a covenant between God and the Hebrews, nor any sacrificial motifs. In the Matthew feeding of 5,000 there was fish, but not wine. Probably in the earliest Christian rites, the bread was broken and celebrated daily (Acts 2:46) and the covenant-sacrifice meal with wine was likely a single annual Christian Passover meal.

Each of the various early Christian communities represented by the four Gospels told the same story but the account was shaped by their own Eucharistic customs. Jesus is depicted 'taking the loaves,' they were 'blessed,' 'and he 'broke,' 'gave,' and they 'ate.' The daily breaking of bread was in anticipation of a future messianic banquet whereas later there was a combination of sacrificial and eschatological (future kingdom) components.

What is very interesting is to compare the feeding of the multitude across Gospels and the contexts in which they occur. The parallel to today's reading in Matthew is also found in Mark and Luke. Here are some important points that are directly applicable to our lives today.

- If you read the first 12 verses of Matthew (copied into the Study Notes below) which are not a part of today's reading, you will see the context in which Matthew has deliberately contrasted two different banquets: The first one was hosted by Herod where he was so pleased by the dancing of the daughter of Herodias, that he impulsively offered to give her anything she wanted, and she demanded the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This account is followed by the feeding of a large crowd by Jesus. In Herod's banquet, there is arrogance, self-aggrandizement, overindulgence and scheming and it was held in a Royal Court, ending in murder of a prophet who had dared to challenge their sinfulness. The setting for the feeding of 5,000 was in a "deserted place" reminding the reader of the wilderness where God fed Israel with manna. We pray to learn the lessons of those banquets that do not feed or satisfy but ultimately can only damage and destroy, and to come to the Table of Plenty.
- In two of the accounts, Jesus was withdrawing from the crowds at the time. In Matthew, he was himself aching, having been told about the execution of his teacher, John the Baptist. He was probably mourning and perhaps also wary as to danger he and his own disciples faced. In Mark, he told the disciples they needed rest and proposed

¹ Reginald H. Fuller & Daniel Westberg. *Scripture in depth*. (18OT, 7/31/11). St. Louis Liturgy site

withdrawing to a deserted place. For us today, perhaps this symbolizes the fact that it is not always convenient or easy to serve those in need. Sometimes we must set our own needs aside because those of others are more urgent. And the miracle will come: as we trust in God and give of ourselves, we too will have more than plenty. I don't know why it works, but it does. Try it for yourself. It seems to be a spiritual law of the universe.

- In each case, the crowds tracked and followed him. He was moved with pity, and compassion for them. But in all three accounts, when his disciples suggested that the people all be sent away to fend for themselves in finding food, he said, ***'You give them something to eat.'*** This would appear to be a very important teaching, depicting the role of the apostles and all disciples subsequently in taking care of both the people's temporal and spiritual needs.
- But they had paltry funds and tiny offerings to feed the crowd. This suggests that the kind of feeding that is being offered was miraculous and the disciples were not to be dependent upon their own resources. There may be symbolic meaning in the five loaves, two fishes and a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children (see study notes). It would seem obvious that it would be impossible to feed so many with so little. The lesson for us today is that we are sometimes asked to do the impossible. Today, in order to serve people we too must recognize that it is not in our own strength but the provision will come as we have faith that the needs of others will be met. Faith, in this case, requires us to get off our duffs and give them something to eat, be it literal food or nurturing others spiritually. If we feel that we ourselves do not have enough to give of ourselves, we must join the disciples and renew ourselves in God's strength. If we give out of lack because we're doing it on our own, we are giving a stone instead of bread, to paraphrase another biblical reference. One cannot nurture spiritually or take others where we ourselves have not traveled.

We are fully nurtured at His Table. We are safe. We are open to the miraculous. So let us go forth in gladness, to share with those in need.

***Like the five thousand people you fed,
we run to your holy mountain,
relishing your rich gifts
filling up our
starving
souls,***

***You, the infinitely-more-than-enough,
just like the left-over baskets.***

***You tell us,
feed the hungry, end war, stop injustice,
accept ourselves
the way we
are.***

With your food we can.

Amen.

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