

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about the human reality of hunger and the importance of food. They show that God is able to provide for us in a very miraculous way when material needs press us. They also invite us to prolong God's generosity toward us by opening our hands and hearts to our brothers and sisters in need.

The first reading describes the courageous act of the prophet Elisha in a difficult time of famine. In fact, as the prophet received a couple of loaves offered to him, he shared them with the people who were around him. Although the loaves were not sufficient, given the number of the people present, all ate and were satisfied.

What is behind this text is the idea that God provides for human needs even in most difficult times. The text teaches us also that sharing with those who have nothing draws God's blessing upon those who are generous with what they possess. Therefore, it is in our interest to prolong God's generosity toward our fellows, especially when they are in need.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus feeds five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish. First of all, the Gospel says that as Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, a large crowd of people followed him, because they saw the many signs he performed in healing the sick.

In turn, when Jesus saw that crowd and the state in which they were, he inquired how they could give them something to eat. Unfortunately, he and his disciples did not have any food in provision, except the five loaves and the two fish they found on a boy among the crowd.

Though all that was insufficient, given the number of people present, Jesus ordered the disciples to let the people recline on the grass. Then, he took those five loaves and the two fish; he blessed them and gave to the disciples in order to distribute them to the people. At the disciples' amazement, the food was multiplied to the point that the five thousand people ate at their fill. In the end, the disciples collected twelve baskets with the fragments of the leftover loaves and fish they gave to the people.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is that for God, nothing is impossible. In fact, the feeding of the five thousand people with five loaves and two fish teaches us that our God is a God who makes the impossible possible. What is impossible for us as human beings and what seems to be for us an insurmountable obstacle cannot be the same for God.

The difference between us and God is that we do not operate with the same parameters. In fact, we operate in the limitation of time-space, feasibility-unfeasibility, possibility-impossibility. God, on the contrary, is beyond time and space. He cannot be limited in his action and operation by whatever human factor. Everything for him is of the order of possible and feasible. That is why what seems difficult for us, God can make it feasible.

This is not something we learn from a book, but rather from human experience. In fact, we have met many times people who, at the desperate hours of their lives and in the worst of their hardships, God has saved them from distress in a very miraculous way. Those people tell us that what was impossible for them, God made it possible.

Such an invocation teaches us that we should never be desperate when we have difficult problems. We have to trust God and entrust our lives and our problems to him. We have to convince ourselves that even if things seem to be so difficult now, it will not always be that way. God has his time to intervene and change everything for the best.

We need that trust today more than ever. It was that conviction that pushed the prophet Elisha to give the bread brought to him in a very difficult time of famine to the people who were with him. And as he did, the bread was multiplied over.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the importance of sharing what we have with others. In fact, when we read today's Gospel, we find a deep contrast between the reaction of Phillip and the attitude of Andrew and Jesus.

As Jesus saw the crowd, indeed, he addressed Phillip in order to see if they could find some food for them. In his answer, Phillip shows that what Jesus was asking was almost impossible, because even with the salary of two hundred days of work, they cannot buy enough food to feed those people. In this regard, then, Phillip represents a category of people who look, first of all, at the obstacles lying ahead of their enterprise. Of course, they might be realistic in evaluating the possible difficulties, but such realism can also overlook the power of God to make things work beyond our imagination.

The opposite is the attitude of Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Like Phillip, he was facing the same crowd with a same prospect of impossibility of sufficient food for them. However, he went and found a boy who had a little bit of food and brought him to Jesus. In this way, he contributed to the making of the miracle possible. In this regard, then, Andrew represents a category of people who, without ignoring the obstacles, still initiate the action in trusting the power of God to make the impossible possible.

I sincerely believe that this is the reason why Jesus multiplied the bread in order to feed the people. In doing so, he shows that he takes care of human need; for him, nothing is impossible. I also believe that by multiplying the bread, the boy brought, and not the disciples, Jesus is inviting us to share what we have with those who have nothing.

Of course, there has always been a dilemma about what to offer God. Many people still hesitate to offer, because they do not have enough or it would be a shame if people could see the small amount of what they give. However, we have to remember that any offering, small as it might be, God can make it big for the glory of his name. He can multiply hundredfold what we personally consider as insignificant and unworthy of him.

That is why we should never hesitate to give. What counts most is not the quantity of what we give, but the quality of the heart that gives. We have always to remember that little is always much in the hands of Jesus. The boy did not have too much to offer, but in what he brought, Jesus found the way of performing a miracle. May God bless you!

**2 Kings 4: 42-44; Ephesians 4: 1-6; John 6: 1-15**



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