

A Boy and His Basket of Bread and Fish

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time – John 6:1-15

July 29, 2018

This week we have the wonderful miracle story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. This story is told in some fashion in all four gospels. This story is the framework of our Eucharistic liturgy. This story reflects what the Church says is the preview of the "Eternal Banquet" in heaven. And yet, in the midst of this great story is a boy and his basket of bread and fish. Why? Does that have anything to do with the rest of the story? I am going to venture that it does. A boy, probably impoverished, is walking through the crowd of 5,000 only to be stopped and relieved of his lunch! Can you imagine?

Jesus sets up this scenario in a brilliant way. He asks Philip, **"Where can we buy enough food for them to eat."** The answer to that question was obvious. There wasn't a market within miles. Philip (probably thinking Jesus had lost his mind) answers him, **"Two hundred days wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little."** Bingo! There isn't enough food to feed all the people.

Andrew and Peter try to exaggerate the desperate situation by demonstrating to Jesus that the only thing they have come across, that resembles food, is this boy's small ration of fish and chips. Tell us, Jesus, How are you going to feed all these people with that small amount of food? In their exasperation they ask Jesus...**"but what good are these for so many."**

Can you imagine the exchange of conversation between Jesus and this small boy? I suspect that Jesus would have gently asked the boy if he might use what little the child had to offer. And what surprise there might have been when this child witnessed the power and enormity of this miraculous multiplication. What this child gave up came back to him in spades.

My thoughts this week are that there is a deep and important lesson here. When the world's poor are starving, when the homeless and the displaced are great in number, our usual response is that we can't fix "the problem" because we don't have enough money or time or gift to get involved. But if each of us give a little, then Jesus can make the miraculous happen.

In the midst of this miraculous story is also an important lesson about our weekly Eucharistic meal. Jesus, having borrowed only **"five barley loaves and two fish"**, invites the people to gather for a meal. **"Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them..."** This is the very formula that we use during Mass. Each week, Father takes the bread, gives thanks and distributes it to feed all of us with the Body of Christ. This is a meal of spiritual nourishment. Many don't come to Mass because they believe they have anything to gain or anything to give.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Everyone is welcome to the banquet of the Lord. All are invited, in their own poverty, to receive the life-giving food of Jesus. In turn, we are then called to be the boy with his basket of bread and fish, taking out to the world the little we have and allowing Jesus to multiply our gifts and talents into miraculous opportunities for the world.

Blessings!


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