

NO ONE SHOULD BE HUNGRY

During a time of famine, the great prophet Elisha took all that he was given – twenty barley loaves – and fed it to a hundred people. When they had eaten, there was some left over.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus and his disciples sat on a mountain when a large crowd was coming near. His first thought was "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"

Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little."

We know the rest of the story: Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish, and distributed them to 5000 men (and wives and children). After everyone had their fill, the disciples collected twelve wicker baskets full of fragments.

In an average month, an estimated 260,000 people are receiving food from a food pantry in the Oregon Food Bank Network. The rate of food insecurity (being without access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) in Oregon is 14.6%. About 552,900 Oregonians are food insecure; of those 194,070 are children. (Oregon Food Bank)

We do not need another miracle of loaves and fishes today. We do not need an exponential increase in food pantries and volunteer hours, for when did charity become a primary tool to combat hunger and not just an emergency response? No, we need an economic system that ensures that the silos of food we store are distributed across the nation and shared throughout the world. Pope Benedict uttered similar words a decade ago.

What was once known as food stamps is now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to emphasize the supplemental (versus primary) nature of the means to procure food. Yet a survey of our hungry brothers and sisters demands the question: Where is the "S" in SNAP?

We can choose to offer the same healthy and nutritious food we serve our guests, not the scraps from our tables. We can choose whether to have a doughnut to eat after mass. The poor on food stamps don't have a choice: the food they can afford is the least expensive but the highest in calories.

Another government program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), helps emergency food pantries and food banks offer food at no cost to Americans in need of short-term hunger relief. It began in 1981 as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program. When did the "T" in TEFAP change from "temporary" to "the?"

Hunger does not discriminate among denominations. Hunger is a universal malady, which requires the cooperation of all peoples, faiths, and governments to eliminate.

St. Paul urges us "to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received." We have received the Baptismal call that demands Catholics feed the hungry with one hand and, with their other hand, call their state and federal representatives. We have received the Baptismal call that demands Catholics ask themselves, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" while also asking, "How can we advocate for food justice?"

We *can* create a better Oregon where no one is hungry. Each one of us can because, as the Responsorial Psalm reminds us, "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs. **We are the hands of the Lord.**"

No one should be hungry.

(Readings for the Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time)

