

July 29, 2018

2 Kgs 4:42-44; Eph 4:1-6, Jn 6:1-15

Famine and starvation are not new phenomena. Famine has existed and plagued humanity from the earliest times. During the middle ages as many people died of famine as died of the plague, in this country 7 million died of starvation during the great depression, and today in some parts of the world as many as 16,000 children a day die from hunger. For most of us, instead of wondering how many days till our next meal, we just have to wonder if we are going to get our food from Haniford's or Price Chopper or where we will go out to eat. It was in a time of famine that the story we heard in our first reading happened. Elisha is a model of one who provides for those in his care. He feeds 100 people with 20 loaves. The food was presented to Elisha personally, and instead of gorging himself on food, he shared it with all those around him, and they all ate, with some left over. There are hungry people even in own community in need of help, however, a lack of food is not the only famine being experienced in this world.

We are called to take the resources we have and to share with those who are hungry in our world. This is an underlying theme in our readings today. The Lord provides enough food in the world to feed all the people here, it is just that some people in the world are hoarding and wasting the food. Pope Francis has said in *Laudato Si* that the problem is:

... extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some ... a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be [supported across the world] ... Besides, we know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and "whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor".

God provides humanity with all that we need, if we share it properly. When we let our own hungers for food, entertainment, and objects cause us to spend all our resources on ourselves then it is like we are stealing from the poor. This is an important lesson, but Jesus is saying more.

Some people have supposed that the miracle in the Gospel today is not a supernatural miracle of God's power, but in fact a simple application of the lesson we were just talking about. They say that what happened was not Jesus multiplying the loaves, but that everyone simply shared what food they had with each other. Although this image displays the type of sharing that is needed in our world - in the case of this specific event, it is not accurate.

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four Gospels and in none of these is the message that you are able to just fix the problem yourself by sharing what you have. In Mark's account of the same story Jesus says: *My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have*

nothing to eat. There was no food for them to share - that is why Jesus suggests that they need to go to buy the food. It is important to know that it is not the people who are providing the food. In the Gospel accounts Jesus takes the little bit someone can offer, blesses it, give it to the hands of his disciples, and then to the people. In fact, it must have been a miracle because afterwards they try to make Jesus their king - this would not have been the reaction if something miraculous had not happened. Jesus' power was operating for we read: *He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do.* Jesus was going to feed everyone with them helping to distribute what he provided, but he was trying to show them something else too. This miracle was about more than taking what you have been given by the Lord and spread it around.

This story links back to the story we heard from Elisha, connects to the feeding of the Israelites in the desert with manna where God provided them with "daily bread," and it links forward to the story of the Last Supper. God does provide the food - and its not just the physical food that with our resources we are able to buy to share - there is also an important spiritual food available that satisfies a hunger that many people don't even know they have! It is a hunger that exists in so many people's lives that we try to fill with things other than God, but always end up not satisfied. The word used in this story for Jesus "giving thanks" before he distributes the food is the same word that is the root our word "Eucharist." The use of this word, and the timing of this feeding event near the feast of passover connects it to the saving passover event (where God provides a way out of the slavery of sin), it links this food to the manna in the desert that sustains us day by day on the journey, and connects to the Last Supper which brings that food to us today in our Eucharist. Through this miracle we heard about today, Jesus shows that ***he himself*** is the bread, ***he*** is an endless supply of spiritual food for as many as come to him.

The spiritual food we receive in our Eucharist brings the presence of Christ into us to fill us spiritually - satisfying the needs that only God can really satisfy. We are able to not only feed the hungry in the world, but also bring that presence of Christ into the world to help to elevate the spiritual famine the world finds itself in. The grace we receive in this sacrament should show itself in tangible ways as we do our part to help provide a fair distribution of this world's resources, and also lead us to distribute the resource of that spiritual food - the presence of Jesus - that multiplies itself over and over again by his power. Let us all allow the bread of life that we receive to transform us into the presence of Christ in the world. In our Eucharist we are strengthened as a part of the body of Christ, the Lamb of God, who has the power to fill all the world to overflowing; we are all called to use this plenty to meet all human needs both materially and spiritually.