

August 2, 2020
Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

God is faithful. When we experience difficulties, tragedies, failures God is faithful, he comes to us to strengthen us, to console us, to give us what we need. God does not always come when we want, or exactly in the way that we want, but God does come with great power and tremendous love. God showers love upon us, even when we sleep, when we are asleep physically or spiritually. God gives us love and strengthens us in ways that we are not always able to see, to hear, feel or understand. Yet, God understands us even in our human limitations and is patient with us even when we become angry with God for not doing what we want. The faithful, mature disciple learns from the pages of the scriptures, the teaching of his only Son Jesus, by faithfully celebrating the sacraments and through the example of the lives of the saints that God's power and love is always with us.

Both the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew give us words that follow experiences of intense suffering. Isaiah the prophet preached the words that we hear in the first reading today after the one of the worst moments in history of people of Israel, the Babylonian exile. They had lost everything, the Promised Land, their freedom, the temple. This tragedy was mostly of their own making because they failed to follow the warnings of other prophets. They freely rejected God's word and God freely allowed them to live with the tragic consequences. God remained faithful even though they were not faithful. We hear the tender words of Isaiah as God calls them out of exile: "All you who are thirsty come to the water! You who have no money, come receive grain and eat; come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!" This reading is one of the selections that we read at the Easter Vigil before the elect are initiated.

In Matthew's Gospel, we hear how Jesus dealt with the death of John the Baptist, essentially to grief the loss of his cousin. Imagine what impact that had on him. He withdrew in a boat to a deserted place to be by himself. When he saw the vast crowd, he was moved with pity for them and he cared for them as a shepherd with abundant love. He healed them. He fed them.

The story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish was so central in the life of the early church, that it is the only story appears in six times and is recorded in all four Gospels. This story helped the first Christians in their times of persecution to remember the abundant love of God. Notice that Jesus takes what humans provide, five loaves made with human hands and two fish caught by humans and increases those simple gifts to a level beyond imagination. There was such an abundance that not only were the 5000 men fed, so too were the women and children, who were not counted. Then there were also twelve baskets left over. Jesus comes to us in our need and gives his very self, in abundance.

Archbishop Etienne has called every Catholic to give special attention to the meaning of the Jesus presence in the Mass in this Year of the Eucharist. He points out that no matter who we are, even if we are someone who studies and teaches about the Eucharist every day, or if we are preparing to receive the Eucharist for the first time, there is still more to learn, more to discover. Rightly so, since in the Eucharist we encounter Jesus himself, in his body, blood, soul and divinity. There is nothing like the Eucharist. As one of the Eucharistic songs called says: *You, who the whole world cannot contain, come into our hearts to dwell.*

Today, (Saturday) we celebrated (we celebrated) the Feast of St. Alphonsus Ligouri, the founder of the Remptorist priests and brothers. His motto was "With God redemption abounds." God's redemption abounds in the Eucharist. Even if you are viewing this Mass and not receiving the Eucharist today, God's redemptive love is given to you spiritually, even if not sacramentally. We, the mystical body of Christ, the Church are still one in Christ. Come to the Lord. He will fill you when you are hungry and in need.