

## **Scarcity Breeds Scarcity**

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

July 25, 2021

Fr. Tony Davis

The therapist Beatrice Chestnut gives this advice to those who detach from the world because it seems too demanding for them: 'Remind yourself that scarcity breeds scarcity.' That could be Jesus' advice to his disciples in today's Gospel.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus asks his disciples to feed a crowd of 5,000. Philip immediately responds with a mindset of scarcity. He says, "two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." As it turns out, Philip was not wrong. They only had 5 loaves and 2 fish! In spite of this scarcity, Jesus intervenes, multiplies the loaves and fish, feeds the crowd, and has fragments leftover.

In our First Reading from the Second Book of Kings, we have another story of someone being asked to feed lots of people with a little food. When presented with twenty barely loaves and grain, Elisha tells the man to give it to the people to eat. Like Philip, the man objected, saying, "how can I set this before a hundred people?" In other words, there will never be enough. Yet, as the story concludes, the crowds were fed and there were fragments leftover.

Whether or not these scripture stories are embellishments or actually miracles, they nevertheless call us beyond the scarcity mindset, a mindset which is always afraid of not having enough. This could apply not only to food, but also to energy, resources, knowledge, time, and

God's grace. As Chestnut explains, "when you view the world through a lens that sees everything in terms of the scarce resources that you have to hold on to, you may magnify your experience of scarcity. Focusing on what you have to grasp onto in order to survive only perpetuates the belief in and the reality of insufficiency. A scarcity mentality keeps you trapped in a mental model in which you have to get by on very little." (*The Complete Enneagram*, 258) Again, scarcity breeds scarcity. Ironically, whenever we think this way, we can fall into the sin of avarice, or extreme greed. Since we become convinced that we do not have enough, we retreat and hold on more tightly to what we do have. This results in us isolating ourselves from others and being afraid of any demands being placed upon us. As these scripture passages suggest, God wants to break us out of this cycle of scarcity. For Jesus, with his help, we do have enough, we will be enough, and we are enough.

*To do the work of God, we cannot have a mindset of scarcity.*

Am I constantly worrying about my own needs that I forget about the needs of others? Do I refuse to share because I am afraid of running out myself? Do I think of life as scarcity or abundance?

As we continue with this mass, let us remind ourselves that scarcity breeds scarcity. Instead of perpetuating this cycle, let us turn to a God who multiplies the loaves and fish. Perhaps if we think in terms of abundance, abundance will breed abundance.