

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 29, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: 2 KGS 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, and fresh grain in the ear. Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat." But his servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat." "For thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'" And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

R. (cf. 16) The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The LORD is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The LORD is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Second Reading: EPH 4:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were

also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Gospel: JN 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In difficult times do you see the donut, or the hole? Is the glass half-empty, or half-full? More importantly when you see the glass as half-empty and there is a need for a full glass, do you see God as fully capable of supplying the missing portion? The chorus of a children's song goes, "There are infinite possibilities in little beginnings, if God is in it, if God is in it." This week's Gospel is about the infinite possibilities God can do with little beginnings.

Jesus' ministry, and several Old Testament accounts of God's dealing with Israel, demonstrate God's power to create and multiply food to meet people's needs. For instance, the Israelites were saved from starvation during the Exodus, by the provision of manna from heaven. The prophet Elisha in this week's first reading saw God multiply a small portion of bread and corn sufficiently enough to feed a hundred hungry men. Elijah's life, along with that of a widow and her son, was spared when the widow of Zarepath unselfishly gave the last of her meager supply of oil and flour to make Elijah's meal (1 Kings 17). And in the New Testament we see Jesus create wine from water, and twice multiply a few loaves of bread and fish sufficiently enough to feed thousands. In most of these incidences there was more food left over than when they began.

Can God create something out of nothing, and multiply a little bit into the needed amount? The answer is without question, "Yes!" However, the questions that should occupy us are, "Why did he insure that we would have a written record of his miraculous power, and saving grace in these incidences?" and "What is the lesson he wants us to learn, and the knowledge he wants us to possess about him?"

One lesson may well be that we should not discount the impact of the infinite possibilities our little contribution can make in the Kingdom of God, when it is willingly given over to God. The widow of Zarepath only had a cup of oil and a bit of flour, Elisha's servant only had a twentieth of what was needed, and the disciples had only a few loaves of bread and a few fish. Their resources, in proportion to what they needed, could only be described as falling far short even of being half-full. Yet even these small portions given over to an all-powerful God, could be multiplied to meet needs in tremendous ways in God's kingdom. Imagine how different sacred Scripture would be if the widow of Zarepath, Elisha, and the young boy had not voluntarily made their little beginnings available to God's infinite power. Imagine how impoverished would be both their faith and ours if they had not come to understand this "infinite possibilities" concept of God.

"From all sides people have streamed to the man whose name is on every tongue. Their physical hunger is expressive of their spiritual. Jesus sees both, and performs the symbolic act of blessing bread and fish and distributing them. Thousands eat their fill, and quantities of food are left over. The meaning of the miracle is clear. It does not consist of the feeding of the crowd. From the practical standpoint, the disciples are quite right to suggest that the people go into the surrounding villages and buy food. No, the feeding of the thousands is a revelation of divine abundance. This is the gesture of the active, giving source of divine love; the nourishing of the bodies is but the prefiguration of the sacred nourishment soon to be proclaimed from Capharnaum."^{*}

Let's become like little children in our faith and once again nourish the belief that , "There are infinite possibilities in little beginnings, if God is in it, if God is in it."

* *The Lord*, by Romano Guardini, (page 230).

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. What is the difference between Elisha's attitude and that of his servant?

Second Reading

2. If the things listed in Ephesians 4:4-6 are supposed to be the basis of our unity, why are they so often a factor in disunity?

Gospel Reading

3. Describe the convictions of the multitudes before and after the miracle.
4. How can you apply the truths this passage teaches to your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.