

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 25, 2021, Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44

⁴² A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat."

⁴³ But his servant said, "How am I to set this before a hundred men?" So, he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" ⁴⁴ So he set it before them. And they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

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: Ephesians 4:1-6

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Gospel: John 6:1-15

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ²And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. ³Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so, the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also, the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

¹⁵Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself

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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 Capernaum." *

Let us 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."

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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. What is the difference between Philip's response and Andrew's?
5. 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.