

Homily Notes for Sunday, August 02, 2020, 18th in Ordinary Time A
Readings: Isa 55:1-3; Ps 145: 8-9, 15-16, 17-18; Rom 8:35, 37-39, Matt 14:13-21

1. Summary: How assuring that during a time of anxiety and fear, today's readings show the generosity of God who shares His riches with his faithful. Yet we may well ask, "When there is such a positive offer made, why is it that some of those in the world, and even in the Church, do not find such fulfillment, but rather frustration and incompleteness? How can we be sure to place ourselves on the generous side of God? Let us look closer at our readings.

2. The first reading, Isaiah: This reading shows God's promises to his people who were returning from slavery to Palestine after the Exile. These were the faithful who had answered the call to leave Babylon to return to a land occupied by hostile foreigners, to the city of Jerusalem whose walls had been torn down. They would have neither crops nor defenses. Isaiah tells them that the Lord will provide for them. **But there are conditions.** The people are enjoined to "Heed me and you shall eat well...come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life." Those who do not "heed" the Lord will not receive the blessing. How can we be prepared "to heed well"? Example of listening and "heeding well," Elinor Carranza and COVID treatment.

3. The psalm reading also emphasizes how God will provide for us. But the Psalm also contains a condition to the promise: "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth (v. 18)."

4. The second reading: St Paul emphasizes that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus. Who is the "us" who cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? It is the members of the early Christian community. It would now be us here who are "heeding and listening" to the Lord. We can see this generosity present spiritually when we carry our cross daily, or suffer, or are persecuted, or even martyred. It is only we ourselves who can separate ourselves from that love of God through sin or lack of faith.

5. The Situation of the Gospel Message (Matthew 14).

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Who were the 5,000 who were fed? They were the crowd that followed Jesus out into a deserted place immediately after Jesus's cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed by Herod. We could have expected most people to stay away from Jesus, fearing the same fate, but these are those who followed him, having now at least a beginning of faith.

6. And this situation shows the special identity of "the crowd." Jesus's departure into the desert was understood by the early Church Fathers as the "multitude" leaving the Synagogue and entering the Church. These are the faithful who listened to, who heeded Jesus. The faith of the multitude is shown by how much they endured hunger for the Lord, even staying in that deserted place with him until the evening.

7. Let us note how faithful and generous our Lord was while under great pressure and sadness. He was trying to get away to be alone after a tragedy. But the crowd followed him. When he got out of the boat and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick, he taught them, and when evening came and they had nothing to eat he performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

8. How powerful and how generous our Lord is! He was able to take the five loaves and the two fishes and feed the crowd. And there were twelve baskets of fragments left over! How generous God is with his people.

9. Yet, today I want us to cultivate out critical spiritual skills, asking questions about the teaching and going deeper. For example, I think it is important to ask about the Bible readings, "Is there any contradiction between our own Christian experience and the event in Scripture?" Why do certain persons seem to receive such blessings, prosperity, friends, good relationships and others do not? "With such generosity to His people, why are there so many inactive Catholics in and around our parishes, and why does it appear that there are so few college students really active?" Why do we have the need for FOCUS missionaries to be with us and to work so hard among the college population? How can this be explained?

Reflections:

10. Let us first check carefully who is being blessed in the readings. Note that all those receiving the promises are those who are deeply committed to God.

11. In the first reading, the promises are directed to the faithful People of God, those who have left Babylon to return. Furthermore, the promises are directed to those who will “heed God.” These are those who have “listening ears”, eager for the guidelines and Word of God.

12. In the Psalm response the promises of the good of the Lord is for “all those who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.”

13. In the second reading these assurances are promised for “us”, that is, the faithful Christians of the Churches.

14. In the Gospel, the bread and the fishes are shared with those who left their cities (The Synagogue) and went out with Jesus into the desert (The Church).

15. What does this tell us about being able to receive the blessings of God?

First, that we need to be amongst the “faithful of God”, those who “heed” the words of Jesus.

This means that not only do we “believe” in Him but that we really place Him first in our lives. This means that we also obey his commandments. It is only for those who overcome the sins and attractions of the world that the blessings of peace and prosperity, of stability and friendship will come.

Does this mean that the faithful will always be blessed with good things?

16. This highlights the need for evangelization, of bringing people to Jesus. This is not just knowing who Jesus is, but accepting him as most important in our lives, as Lord and Savior, and also “heeding carefully” his Word, following his commands.

This is why there is such frustration in the world, when people seek the blessings and benefits of God without making him truly their Lord and Savior. We seek the forgiveness of sins so that we can have the blessings of peace and unity.

Note the Eucharistic Prayer wording:

“Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.” Why?” Forgiveness of sins.

“This is the cup of my blood... It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.”

And in the Communion liturgy:

(We either say or hear these words every time we attend Eucharist.

“Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your Apostles, I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins but upon the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom...”

“Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us (2)

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.”

“This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.”

17. “Heeding” his commands shows us the way to happiness, good relationships, good jobs, prosperity and salvation.

Why do we have “drama” and “gossip”? Is it not because of sin?

Why do people get angry and fight and be in conflict? Is it not because they are hurt through sinful, destructive behavior?

What allows good friendship to develop and be sustained? Is it not a godly loyalty and thoughtfulness, rightness in treating one another?

What kinds of attitudes make for employable people? Is it not those who have been serious and honest about developing their talents?

What leads to a stable and prosperous society? Is it not the absence of corruption and greed and the presence of integrity and trust? (Examples of Central American countries and many others? 20,000 deaths from illegal immigrants trying to cross from Libya to Europe!

Etc. What other examples can you give out of your own experience?

18. In conclusion, while our God is incredibly generous to us, to benefit from this generosity we must be the obedient and the faithful people He desires. What are our challenges to be this?