

**Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time; August 2, 2020**  
**FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY**

There was a minister who began his sermon every Sunday by first bowing his head for a moment of prayer. One day his little daughter asked him why he did that. He was pleased that his daughter noticed this gesture of prayer he started with and he told her "I ask God to help me preach a good sermon. Then she said, "**Then why doesn't he help you do it?**"

Seriously though, the little girl found out that God doesn't always give us everything we ask for. But in today's first reading he tells us he will give us what we truly need if we come to him. In the gospel we hear how Jesus responded to the needs of the people who came to him.

St. Matthew today tells us that when John was put to death, Jesus withdrew by himself. Most likely he needed some time to grieve. But the disciples and the crowd caught up with him. *He put his own personal needs aside when he saw the crowd.* Matthew and Luke tell us he cured the sick; Mark tells us he taught them. (He probably did both.) As the day began to fade, the issue of food came up. The gospel does not go into detail on how Jesus achieved this marvelous event, only through faith can we believe that Jesus fed 5000 men (not counting women and children) with five loaves and two fish.

**The Lord continues to feed us in a miraculous way today — a mysterious feeding that also requires our faith.** In the Eucharist today we also have a sign of the coming kingdom, when we will be united with Jesus our Lord and savior forever. Paul confirms this when he tells us in the second reading that, in spite of our unworthiness, nothing in all of creation will separate us from his love. The multiplication of the loaves happens in our fields every year between sowing and harvest time. Like the miracle of Jesus, this miracle too is brought about by the power of God. And just as Jesus needed the hands of the apostles to distribute the bread to the people, so God now needs human hands to make this abundance available to the hungry.

The other five billion make do on the other 20 percent. The world has 840 million chronically malnourished people, most of them women and children. Seven million children in the world under the age of five die each year from malnutrition. The Department of Agriculture in our own country, estimates there are 3.8 million families who experience hunger and up to 12 million families concerned about having enough food to feed their families. Hunger is real. The disciples say send them away. Do we not offer similar suggestions? Let the government feed them, let social services take care of them, let the unemployment office help them, let the homeless shelters take them in.

Meanwhile, the government is knocking on the door of faith-based communities saying, "When are you going to help?" Leaping from the pages of scripture Jesus exclaims, "Do not send them away. Give them something to eat." Mother Teresa told how she once came across a Hindu family that hadn't eaten for days. She took a small quantity of rice and gave it to the family. What happened next surprised her. Without a moment's hesitation the mother of the family divided the rice into two. Then she took one half of it to the family next-door, which happened to be Moslem. Seeing this Mother Teresa said to her, 'How much will you have left over? Aren't there enough of yourselves?' 'But they haven't eaten for days either,' the woman replied. The miracle of the loaves and fishes could be called a miracle of generosity. First of all there is the marvelous generosity of the boy, who, with his gift of five loaves and two fish, made the miracle possible. **It was a small thing in itself, but for the little boy it was a big thing because it was all he had.** It's easy to give something that we won't really miss. But when the gift is as desperately needed by the giver as by the receiver, that is true giving. That is a sacrifice.

Then there was the marvelous generosity of Jesus. To appreciate this we need to consider the circumstances of the miracle. It's easy to reach out to others when it doesn't cause us much inconvenience. Not so easy when it is sprung on us at an awkward moment. Here a real sacrifice is involved. We have to set aside our plans, and forget about ourselves, So it was with Jesus. He had just learned that his cousin, John, had been murdered as mentioned above. He needed peace and quiet. That is why he and the apostles crossed to the far side of the lake. But when he stepped out of the boat he found a throng of people waiting for him. He might have got angry and sent them away. Instead he had compassion on them and gave himself completely to them.

Then there was the sheer generosity of his response to the hunger of the people. Not only did he feed them, but he saw to it that each got as much as he wanted, and even so there were twelve full baskets left over. You can see then why this could be called a miracle of generosity. Generosity is not always about giving things. More often it is about giving of ourselves, of our time, our gifts. Giving things can be easy, but giving of oneself is never easy. Before giving himself as food and drink in the Eucharist, Jesus gave of himself to people in so many other ways.

In the Eucharist we taste the love of God. The proof that we have experienced that love will be our willingness to love others. We may be able to give only in small ways and in small amounts. However, from the little boy in the Gospel we see that a small amount can become a big amount when placed in the hands of the Lord. Again;  
**:Bring them to me!"**