

HOMILY for 18th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talk about Jesus' feeding a hungry crowd. Reflecting on it, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

One day a farmer went to church. When he entered he saw that he & the preacher were the only ones present. The preacher asked the farmer if he wanted him to go ahead & preach. The farmer said, "I'm not too smart, but if I went to feed my cattle & only one showed up, I'd feed him." So, the minister began his sermon.

One hour passed, then two hours, then two-and-a-half hours. The preacher finally finished & came down to ask the farmer how he had liked the sermon.

The farmer answered slowly, "Well, I'm not very smart, but if I went to feed my cattle & only one showed up, I sure wouldn't feed him all the hay!"

Anyway, Jesus fed His herd today all the hay & even got some left over! As you might know, Jesus was able to bring the people of God comforting words & hopeful messages such as the Beatitudes. He consoled them in this way, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are the sorrowing... Blessed are the lowly... Blessed are they who hunger & thirst for holiness... Blessed are those when people insult, persecute, & utter every kind of slander because of me..." He wanted those suffering folks to know that He got their back, & He was on their side. They would not have to suffer alone or feel abandoned. For He wanted to suffer with them & lift them up from their daily struggles. Then, He taught them, "...Blessed are they who show mercy... Blessed are the single-hearted... Blessed too the peacemakers... Blessed are those persecuted for holiness' sake..." For He wished His followers to be merciful people & peacemakers while focusing on the Kingdom of God & making sacrifices for it. He desired them to be people of virtues & become like Him. But, He didn't stop there. He wanted them to be people of actions & authenticity by feeding the hungry & healing the sick & the suffering. That is why Jesus traveled from town to town to do all the mission work instead of sitting in a classroom or an office. That is why Jesus this to His disciples in today's Gospel, "...There is no need for them [the vast hungry crowd] to disperse. Give them something to eat yourselves." It is not just a calling or an invitation for all His disciples to feed the hungry & care for the poor & the social outcast. Rather, it is a command for them to practice Christian charity & follow their new way of life every day.

Like the rest of the world, Jesus' disciples resisted to this new command of His as they responded, "This is a deserted place, & it's already late. Dismiss the crowds so that they may go to the villages & buy some food for themselves." But, after thinking over Jesus' new teaching & challenge for them, they said, "We have nothing here except five loaves & a couple of fish." The evangelist Matthew does not tell us where the disciples found that meager source of food in this Gospel passage. But other Gospels let us know that the disciples were able to find a little boy/lad who was willing to share that little provision of his with the community in need. I often wonder how today's miracle might have turned out if the boy/lad would keep the little food all to himself & refuse to share it.

First of all, Jesus would not be able to begin this miracle & make it come true for the whole crowd. Second, Jesus taught them an important lesson about how to build a peaceful world & a loving community of God. Because He saw how His homeland was hurt & terrorized by the Roman Empire & many other occupying powers before it. He helped them heal by

learning to share & helping one another. If they did not learn to share God's blessings for them with the community around them, everyone would remain miserable & continue to act selfishly & fight with one another. That is exactly what has happened in our world these days. We have allowed the rich, the powerful, & the politicians to get ourselves fight with one another over resources & refuse to share God's blessings for us with the community around us. We have let those agents of darkness to make us act selfishly & keep everything for ourselves. We have permitted those silver tongues to mislead us & make us think that anything has to do with community is Communism or Socialism. It is time for us & anyone who calls oneself a Christian to read this Sunday's Gospel every day & learn from Jesus what it means to be a peaceful world & a loving community of God. They need to break bread & share with the community around them.

Third, Jesus let us know how we could keep the same miracle going in our world in this day & age. When we act kindly & generously, God will find ways to multiply our portions & we will have plenty of leftover in the end. In fact, today's Gospel tells us that a crowd of over five thousand ate their fill; & His disciples gathered the leftover filled twelve baskets. So, don't let the rich, the powerful, & the politicians dupe you & bring out the worst in you by acting selfishly & greedily. Otherwise, we will not ever see a miracle like the one in today's Gospel again.

Lastly, Jesus taught us one more important lesson on following a life of virtues, particularly compassion & generosity if we want to be like Him. Here is how today's Gospel tells us about it, "...When Jesus disembarked & saw the vast throng, His heart was moved with pity; & He cured their sick." We live in a facetious world where some people exploit the kindness & compassion of others for their own benefits. That is why some of us hesitate to act with care & compassion as Jesus taught us because we do not want to appear being taken advantage of & look stupid. We have also seen political & religious leaders who show no compassion or kindness in their decisions & daily actions. Hence, we mistakenly assume that we should behave the same way. The one whom, we should imitate & follow is our Lord Jesus, not some human leader! Today's Gospel lets us know that Jesus' heart was moved with pity when He saw a tired & hungry crowd. Have we seen a political or religious leader feel the same way like Jesus did? When we see suffering people in our country & around the world because of poverty, disasters, & wars, I hope that we would show them a heart of kindness & compassion. In case we would like to know how the heart of God looks like, today's First Reading has this message for us, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money; come, receive grain & eat. Come, without paying & without cost, drink wine & milk!" That is how kind & generous our God is to everyone! It is all up to us to imitate our God & do the same!

My dear brothers & sisters, St. Paul in today's Second Reading reminds us about God's love for us in Jesus Christ which remains the same in spite of all the challenges happening in our lives. That vast crowd experienced it today through Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand hungry mouths & His healing of many sick & afflicted souls. They also felt His caring & compassionate heart. Hopefully we would imitate Him & try to show God's love & compassion to the world around us every day.