

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-B

July 29, 2018

First Reading – 2 Kings 4:42-44

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 145

Second Reading – Ephesians 4:1-6

Gospel – John 6:1-15

My dear people of God:

Please know that the story (a very short story indeed; only three verses) in our first reading, is the fourth of a chain of four stories or four miracles performed by Elisha. Yahweh showed His mercy and providence thru the prophet Elisha, known to be a *holy man*; and a *man of God*. Elisha continued the prophetic mission of his mentor, the prophet Elijah.

(1) Please recall the first story in the Second Book of Kings (2 Kings 4:1-7). There was a woman (who was a widow of one of the guilded prophets), who had no money to pay the creditor of her deceased husband. The creditor threatened to make her orphaned children his slaves if she could not pay her loan. The widow asked Elisha for help. Elisha helped her raise funds by multiplying the oil in her jug. Yahweh, through Elisha, multiplied the oil and she was able to fill all the empty vessels she could get hold of. With the sales of the oil, she was able to pay her debts.

{We are reminded here of the jug of oil and the jar of flour of the widow in Zarephath told in the First of Book of Kings (1 Kings 17:7-16)}

(2) In verses 8 to 17, right after first story, there is the second story of a Shunammite woman, (a woman of some influence), who with her old husband gave food and lodging to Elisha. The man of God rewarded them for their goodness by promising a son to them. But one day (verse 19), the son had a severe headache while he was in the field. The father ordered one his servants to carry the boy to his mother. Soon he died at the lap of his mother. Elisha brought him back to life in verses 35 to 37.

(3) The third story, in verse 38, tells us that Elisha purified an accidentally poisoned stew. The people were able to eat it.

(4) In the fourth story, which is our first reading, Elisha, "*the man of God*" demonstrated the power of God. Twenty barley loaves of bread were brought by a man from Baal-shalishah. Upon seeing the supplies, Elisha commanded the man: "*give it to the people to eat*". The servant asked a genuine and practical question: *how can I give it to one hundred men?* In response to the servant's question, Elisha repeated the command, using exactly the same words he did in the previous verse: *give it to the people to eat*. The difference in the second time is his addition that, "thus says the Lord." These were no longer just Elisha's own words and command, but were now connected with the word of God, and God's promise that they will eat, and there will be some left over. The final verse, with characteristic brevity, tells that the promise came true. They ate and there was some left over, just as the Lord had said.

My dear people of God, I encourage you to feel the power of Psalm 145 which beautifully declares that God feeds His people: *The hand of the Lord feeds us; He answers all our needs*. The Lord is faithful in all His words, He is the provider of food. But more than just meeting a necessity, God can satisfy our desires.

In the Second Reading, Paul was telling the Ephesians (and he is telling us now) to make "*every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:3). Please notice that Paul used the word ONE seven times in verses 4 to 6. This sevenfold use of the word "*one*" forms the heart of a poetic statement of the Church's unity. The list culminates with the oneness of God. Since God is the source of the Church's identity, therefore, the unity of the Church reflects the oneness of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us strive to relate/connect our individual experience of God's grace to the larger goal of the *oneness of the Body of Christ, which is the Church*. The unity of the Church is a reflection of God's gift of reconciliation in Christ.

Please know that in the first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he spoke about the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles which God has brought about in Christ. The repeated use of the word one in verses 4 to 6 highlights this aspect of the message: the Church is "*one new humanity*" created by Christ. Through the blood of Christ, God has brought together

two distinct groups under one plan of salvation. Jews were perceived to be "near" to God, while Gentiles were "far off". Through Christ, both groups are now joined together and drawn nearer to God. Jews and Gentiles form one body with Christ as its head.

Many first century Jews and Gentiles struggled to accept the message of reconciliation between them. Paul's message was not embraced and accepted widely in the early Church. Part of the call of Paul is for tolerance, or **"bearing with one another"** (in chapter 4, verse 2). Despite the persistence of differences, we, as a Church may, nevertheless, grow together as a body.

Now, let us go to the Gospel.

We have just heard of a miracle witnessed by thousands of people. And let me add that it is also a parable with many lessons about the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ to meet the vast needs of the world through His inadequate disciples. Although they were completely inadequate to meet the needs of this hungry crowd, they gave the little that they had to the Lord, who blessed it and multiplied it so that they could distribute it to the people.

Please know that this is the only miracle recorded in all four (4) Gospels. It must be very significant. We won't forget how much the Lord can do with little things that are yielded to Him.

A large crowd followed Jesus, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. These people weren't following Jesus because they recognized Him as the Son of God who could save them from their sins. Some were fascinated just seeing the miracles. Others needed miraculous healing for themselves or their loved ones. But overall their reasons for following Jesus were misguided and superficial.

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. The evangelist John gave us the details of Jesus going up on the mountain. We can safely conclude that the evangelist John is leading us to draw a parallelism between Moses and Jesus. Moses led the people out of Egypt after the Passover. Later, he went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. God also used Moses to give manna to the people in the wilderness.

So the mention of the Passover being near is probably more than just a time notice. The evangelist John wants us to see Jesus as *the new Moses*, and a better ONE. Jesus fulfilled what the Passover lamb symbolized. He gave

Himself as the permanent manna or bread of life. He is the Prophet of whom Moses wrote in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, verse 15. I would not be surprised why the people in today's Gospel exclaimed: *"Truly, this is the prophet, the one who is to come into the world"* (John 6:14). And verse 15 says that they wanted to carry Him off and make Him king.

But let us go back to the dialogue between Jesus and Philip. Jesus used this miracle and those that follow to train the twelve. Jesus specifically asks Philip in verse 5: *"Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"*

It would have been great if Philip had responded, *"Lord, I have seen You turn water into wine. I have watched You heal the royal official's son from a distance. I have watched You perform dozens of miracles. Surely, You can provide bread for this hungry multitude, even as God provided manna in the wilderness!"* I would like to guess that that is how you would have responded.

I would have responded that way too. I would have started calculating the way Philip did. But Philip calculated without Christ. He did his Math without considering the Lord's power and concluded with businesslike efficiency. The evangelist John adds in verse 6, *"This He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He intended to do."* Jesus was showing Philip and the other disciples their woeful inadequacy to meet this need, along with His all-sufficiency. So this miracle teaches us that Christ uses inadequate people who surrender what they have to Him to meet the overwhelming needs of others.

We know that a lot of people are needy. But we ourselves are inadequate to meet people's needs. And how often we throw up our hands and conclude that we can't do something for the Lord because we calculate based on our inadequate resources, and not on the blessing He can give to what we yield.

Then, along comes Andrew who says in verse 9: *"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fishes, but what are these for so many people?"* Andrew's comment accentuates the obvious inadequacy: *"What are these for so many people?"* So people are needy, but the Lord's people are inadequate to meet those needs.

Jesus Christ is all-sufficient to meet people's overwhelming needs. We know that *Jesus is the Lord God in human flesh*, Creator of heaven and earth. Nothing is too difficult for Him! We realize that Christ is all-sufficient in many ways. Let me cite four ways.

A. Christ is in control of every situation. Verse 6 is clear: “This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.”

B. Christ is concerned for needy people. Christ was concerned for them. He wants us to learn to look at needy people through His eyes. He has compassion for them and delights to meet their needs.

C. Christ is not limited by our inadequate resources. When Philip came up with his “*200 days worth of wages*” estimate (that he didn’t have anyway), Jesus didn’t say, “Go take a collection from the crowd and see how much we can get.” When Andrew volunteered the information that a boy had five barley loaves and two fish, but added his comment/ apology, “*but what are these for so many people*” Jesus didn’t say, “*I guess there are others in the crowd who also have food. Let’s get everyone to share!*”

We need to realize that Jesus wasn’t limited in any way by that meager lunch. And, He isn’t limited either today by the fact that we don’t have enough money or time or talent to get the Gospel to the whole world. Meeting a need is not dependent on the supply in hand, but on *the blessing of the Lord resting on the supply.*”

D. Christ doesn’t just barely meet needs; He abundantly supplies what we want. Verse 11 tells us that the people ate “*as much as they wanted*”. Nobody went hungry. Everyone was satisfied and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers.

We can only give to others what we have first received from God ourselves. We can’t give what we do not have. The Lord won’t use the 200 days worth of wages that we don’t have. But He will use the inadequate resources that we do have if we yield them to Him.

May we relish in the thought that God really is a good provider and that He multiplies what we yield to Him. Amen.