

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009

We live in a society where parties, celebrations, eating and drinking with friends and relatives have become part of our social life. To be received in the homes of friends and relatives, and to celebrate with them, is an expression of joy and mutual esteem. These moments of celebration are important, but they should not blind us to the possibility of sharing with others, especially the needy, the hungry and the less fortunate. That is the insight today's readings propose for our meditation.

The first reading describes what happened to the prophet Elisha in a very difficult time of famine in the country. As the prophet received a couple of loaves from a man of the village of Baal-shalishah, instead of keeping the food for himself, he shared it with hundred people who were with him. In this way, everyone could have of what he had received in that struggling period of famine.

The prophet made such a decision out of faith that God who gave the opportunity to provide with some bread in such a difficult situation was also able to supply to the needs of his people so that it might be plenty of food for all. That is why, without any hesitation, he gave away what he received for the joy of all present.

The intention with which this text was written was to teach Israel that its survival depends on God alone. But the text teaches us also that in hardships and desperate situations God is always able to open even a small window to let fresh air enter our closed homes. Therefore, we have to trust him and share with others the little we have, in spite of our hardships and difficult situations we are confronted with.

The same trust in God is behind the gesture of Jesus in today's Gospel as he multiplies five barley loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people. Jesus comforts the hungry crowd, as he does at our Eucharistic Celebration, when we break the Bread together. Just as Moses fed miraculously the people in the desert with manna, so our Lord Jesus feeds the crowd in the wilderness. Like Elisha, Jesus did not have enough bread, but he organized the meal anyway. As he did in the past, he does it again today in the Eucharist.

The reason why Jesus fed the crowd was to show them that with him, the kingdom of heaven had arrived in their midst. With him, God was accomplishing the promise he made to the prophets to take care of his people and to lead them to the fullness of joy. So, the time has come to make a feast, because the kingdom of plenty has begun. This is the time of God's blessing through Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of heaven is a gift from God; but it requires our participation in order to make it a reality on earth. That is what the Gospel teaches us. First of all, we have this deep contrasting attitude between Phillip and Andrew. For Phillip,, what Jesus was asking was impossible. The situation was hopeless and nothing could be done. Even two hundred days wages worth of food would not be enough for each one of the crowd to have a little bit of food. Phillip represents those who look only at the obstacles they meet in their undertakings by forgetting that God is a God of the impossible.

Then, we have Andrew. He represents those who do not look first at human obstacles, but trust the power of God to make the impossible possible. It was

Andrew who discovered the boy who had five loaves and two fish, although they were not enough. He brought the boy to Jesus and made the miracle possible.

As it can be seen, we never know what can happen when we bring someone to Jesus. If parents could just bring up their children in the knowledge and the love of God, no one knows what wonderful things these children might do for God and for their fellows in the future.

The little boy did not have too much to offer, but in what he had and he brought, Jesus found the material of a miracle. Jesus needs what we can bring him. It happens that we deprive people of wonderful things God would do for them, because we do not bring to Jesus what we have and what we are. We may not have too much to offer before God, but little is always much in the hands of Jesus. After all, it is the bread that a little boy from the crowd brought that Jesus multiplied.

With this miracle, Jesus wants to teach us that we have to share what we have with the needy, the less fortunate and the hungry. It is only when we share our riches, abilities and knowledge with others that the difficult problems of our world can be resolved. If there are no generous acts of people who offer the fruit of their works for others, if there is no good will to share with those who have not, our world will hardly change its face. We can have a new world only when people no longer base their relationship on selfishness and self-interest.

As Disciples of Christ, why shall we share with others what we have earned by our hard work? As St Paul suggests, in spite of our diversity, we are just one body, the family of God. We have to care for one another as the members of the same family. We form a unity, because we share in the same faith, in one baptism and are guided by the same Lord and the same spirit. Therefore, we have to live in solidarity and mutual assistance.

Another reason that compels us to share is the importance of the Eucharist. Christ challenges us anytime we partake in the Eucharistic bread without having the intention of sharing our material bread with the less fortunate. The fact that the multiplication of bread and fish is done with the words we use during the consecration in the Mass shows that the Eucharist is above all a place of sharing.

Anytime we strive to alleviate the suffering and the pain of our fellow humans, we anticipate the kingdom of God on earth. Anytime we wipe away the tears on the face of the afflicted, we bring heaven close to earth. Anytime we fight disease and famine from the surface of the earth, we anticipate God's kingdom.

The Kingdom belongs to God, but we can anticipate it right now. It is God who saves, but he needs our cooperation. God acts and saves through us. Salvation comes from God, but its actualization on earth comes with us. May God bless each one of us and fill us with his Holy Spirit so that we become instruments he uses to bring happiness and the joy of his kingdom to others. God bless you all!

2 Kings 4, 42-44; Ephesians 4, 1-6; John 6, 1-15



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