

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15

This Sunday, we hear once more the story of how Jesus, using just a few loaves and fishes, fed thousands.

“So the people reclined on the grass, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the five barley loaves and the two fish, gave thanks and distributed them to those who were reclining . . . [and] they had their fill.”

Among the many truths buried in this gospel, we can conclude that: Jesus feeds the hungry; that he gives us more than we could ever need; that he transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. The miracle also foreshadows the Eucharist...the gift of finest wheat.

This gospel does that. What it does **not do** is tell us what a great thing it is to share.

There are layers of meaning to this event. Miracles are offered as signs of God’s presence and activity among us, working through and even with us at times. The Gospel writers make clear - they are not about anything but historical truth about an historical figure named Jesus. Anything less wouldn’t have been worth their time...or their lives.

We use the term 'miracle' to explain what we don't often understand or don't expect. The miracle in the account of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes is just that - the multiplication of the food that can’t be explained in any other way. Just as the changing of water into wine and the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ are miracles.

Mark Shea a popular Catholic writer and speaker who became a Catholic convert in 1987 said:

“Sharing food was not a miracle in Jesus’ culture. This would have been a lack of hospitality which would never happen in Jesus’ time.” The father of a Palestinian Christian family he knew reacted to the interpretation of the ‘miracle of sharing food’ with some warmth, “My family would starve before a guest under our roof went hungry!”

The deeper meaning of this miracle is that this same Jesus now gives millions of people his Body & Blood to eat and drink so that we might live have eternal life.

Feeding that many people without adequate resources is quite a challenge. But the task increases in difficulty when you factor in the women and children as an additional number!

The disciples had a problem. How are they going to take care of all these people, who obviously came without make any plans themselves on how or where they would eat?

As the time grew late, the disciples came to Jesus regarding the dilemma, suggesting that Jesus dismiss the crowd so they can go and take care of themselves. He, however, has other plans.

"You give them something to eat." This imposing statement from Mark's account must have seriously rattled the disciples. In fact, Philip's estimate, in responding to Jesus question about buy enough bread, indicated that it would take about two-hundred day's wages to accomplish the work. But, Jesus wants us to offer whatever resources we might have as a part of the solution.

The miracle was worked because of a modest sharing of what a simple boy had brought with him. Jesus doesn't ask us for what we don't have. Instead, he makes us see that if each person offers the little he has the miracle can always be repeated. **God is capable of multiplying our small acts of love and making us share in God's gift.**

In this great miracle of feeding, and in fact, in every Jewish tradition, a prayer of blessing over food, and a thanksgiving precedes the meal...there is the breaking of the bread and the giving of thanks. Our word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek for "thanksgiving."

So, there you have it. Sometimes a miracle is a just that: a miracle. The dead rise, the lame walk, the blind see, the hungry are fed. God becomes bread. When we attempt to reduce these incredible events into something credible, we turn the gospel into mush.

Jesus gives each of us an invitation to live a life of multiplication, taking what we have and trusting ourselves to Him. This begins with offering to God what we have and then giving God thanks for what God is about to do.

If we place our lives in the hands of Jesus, he will accept and bless us, and he will make such use of our lives as will be beyond our greatest expectations! If we surrender ourselves, like so many loaves and fishes, into the sustaining hands of God, we'll find ourselves transformed with "newness of life," with fullness of life.

Last week, I attended the National Diaconate Institute for Continuing Education (NDICE) 2015. The conference focused on the year-long theme of marriage and the family...I must admit that I felt a little like the 'odd duck' at times being one a a very few single, celibate deacons. But two of the speakers were very much influential about my thoughts on today's gospel.

John Michael Talbott & Bishop William Skylstad (Omak, Washington)

Many of you know John Michael through his sacred music. He has produced (I believe) about 37 music albums and written 26 books...last one being “Nothing Is Impossible With God.” He refers to himself as an ‘old rocker,’ being involved in music since his teens. A convert to Catholicism, he is Founder and General Minister of the Brothers & Sisters of Charity headquartered in Arkansas and Texas. Much like St. Francis, he has taken a vow of poverty and says he doesn’t even have a Social Security account to rely on in his retirement years.

Bishop William (Skeelstad) was ordained to the priesthood in 1960 for the Diocese of Spoken, Washington and appointed Bishop of Yakima, Washington in 1977. Bishop Skylstad (now retired and 81 years of age) believes that his most important role is simply to be a pastor to his people.

Both of these men are very humble individuals. Here are some of the things they had to say...

- We are totally connected to ‘Creator God.’
- We can accomplish miracles by connecting with/engaging others.
 - Share what we have to take care of each other.
- A personal relationship with Jesus should be the focus of our lives.
 - Jesus came not to be served, but to serve others. So should we!
 - We must be about ‘service to others.’ There are no ‘term limits’ to ‘service.’ It is a life style.
- We look at life through the eyes of FAITH! (What are we looking for?)
- We are all unique, but we are all flawed. The desert also has its beauty.
- How do we live our humanity?
- God made each of us ‘just right.
- We gather around the table of the Bread of Life.
- **WE** are now responsible for feeding the multitudes.
- How often do we pray for our Church and its leaders? Our government and its leaders? Pray they may follow the ways of Jesus?
- We must be about relationships with friend and foe alike.
- We need to listen to each other instead of reacting to each other.
- All things are possible with God.
- As a people, we journey together with Jesus as our companion.
 - What a marvelous journey and what a wonderful companion.
- Technology should be able to bring us closer – interconnected.

Today is Malawi Picnic Day. Malawi is not a miracle in the way we understand miracles. Instead, Malawi is a gift of love brought about by God's people willing and able to help those who need us most with our time, talent and treasure.

Our Archdiocesan Capital Campaign is not a miracle. Instead, this campaign is a gift of love brought about by God's people willing and able to help those who need us most with our time, talent and treasure.

Generosity is at the heart of the Eucharist; the generous love of our God for us, the generous sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for our redemption. Generosity is an important element of our relationship with each other as we gather to celebrate God's love in the Eucharist. We share the sign of peace together and we all share in the one bread and we feel the unity that binds together all Christians. Hopefully, leaving this church, we'll be generous to others with our time and our gifts.