

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Fr. Matthew Long

The Church of Jesus the Good Shepherd

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When I was in college I got a job with the City of Bossier City to run a Day Camp at Meadowview Elementary School for underprivileged children in that neighborhood. We spent the morning tutoring the children in math, spelling and english and after lunch we would go to the City Pool across the street so that they could swim. I was raised in a Middle Class family in the country. If someone was in need then their family, the local churches or the community would make sure that their needs were being met. As a result of this I never encountered true poverty until that summer at the Day Camp. The children were required to bring a bag lunch daily. One family consisted of five children who wore the same clothes everyday and I noticed that for their lunch they usually had a piece of fruit, an apple or an orange that was to be divided between the five of them. One orange for five children I was shocked. I called my supervisor and said we have a problem. This cannot be

allowed to go on. I explained the situation to her and she said we will provide lunch for all the children who need it. The next day we had a new task making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. There was a satisfaction in knowing that we were making a difference in these children's lives, that we were helping their minds, that we were letting them have some enjoyment, and that we were satisfying some of their basic needs. The unfortunate thing was that although for those brief six weeks of the summer we could make sure those children were adequately fed but when daycamp ended so did those meals and they were left with nothing to sustain them.

A famine had swept through the land and it was mainly due to the corrupt actions and the inability of the people to follow God's ways. This famine was caused by a drought that had made the raising of crops nearly impossible. As a result of this it was difficult for the people to feed their families. Mothers and fathers would have to try and sleep with growling bellies and the sound of their children crying out that they were hungry. Many of the very old and the very young could not handle

the lack of food and would die. Therefore on top of the misery of living in hunger there was also the pain of burying loved ones who died too soon. Elisha came to visit this community that was suffering from the famine. Because they knew he was a great Prophet of God they welcomed him warmly and he looked beyond their gracious welcome and saw behind it the misery and pain they were suffering.

They lived under a foreign power. The most powerful empire in the world ruled over them, Rome. Their kings had sold out their beliefs for the sake of power and wealth. They no longer followed the ways of God but instead they followed their desires and passions. As a result of this the people they ruled over suffered and there was no one to alleviate their sufferings. They looked everywhere for someone to help them, to deliver them from this place of hopelessness. Their primary feelings were despair and sadness. Then He came. Our Blessed Lord entered into their lives and they watched as he healed the sick and raised the dead. They were amazed as the lame leaped, the blind saw and the mute spoke again. For the first time in a long time there was a small flicker of

hope as they saw this man of God and the signs he performed. They followed him even when he tried to withdraw from them to teach his disciples and rest. Jesus looked and saw this vast crowd coming to this deserted place because of him and he knew they would not leave. He knew that they had followed him across the Sea of Galilee and for fear of losing him they had not stopped or rested and that they hungered. Their souls and their bodies hungered and he saw behind the hunger to the real misery and pain they were suffering.

We live in a world of war and violence. We live in a world where more people lose their jobs everyday. We live in a world whose economy is tottering on the cliff and everyday we wonder will it topple or stabilize. People who were secure are now insecure. Companies who we thought would be around forever have disappeared. We worry about our jobs, we worry about our future, we worry about our children and our parents and our brothers and sisters. We are anxious and concerned because the certainty of living in America and knowing that tomorrow would be just like today are gone. Debts and deficits

increase, taxes and bills increase, but the value of our money and the security of our employment decreases. This is the state we are in and we are looking for something stable and that lasts. Well we have all come to the right place. We have come here to the Church to the House of God because we hope that in this house we will be comforted and we will be given a place to lay down our burdens. We are looking to God and his Church just as the people in Elisha's day did and just as the people in Jesus' day did.

Elisha was presented with bounty because he was God's prophet. He was offered twenty barley loaves and fresh grain. It was enough and then some for him but it was not enough to feed this community whom he had been sent to. But Elisha recognizing God's love for his people. Elisha acknowledging the power of God. Elisha certain of God's never failing generosity, yes Elisha's faith in the Almighty inspired Him to say, "Give it to the people to eat." The servant objected. There is not enough. The servant lacked Elisha's faith so all he saw was what was before his eyes. He did not understand the mighty power of God. He

did his math and made a logical conclusion this is not enough. But Elisha insisted; because he knew, he knew because he believed that when they ate there would be some left over and he was right there was some left over. Therefore not only were they all fed that day but they would all be fed another day as well. God provided for his people through his servant Elisha and gave them enough to sustain them.

Our Blessed Lord was presented with a dilemma. Here was this vast crowd hungering for something more and hungering for something to sustain them. He turned to Philip and asked where he could acquire enough food for them to eat. Philip's reply was similar to the servant of Elisha. We don't have enough. Andrew then spoke up, "There is a boy with five barley loaves and two fish." But he too doubted there was enough. It was then that Jesus took action. It was then that Jesus offered thanks to the Father and fed the five thousand. He fed them and they were satisfied. He fed them all and still there were 12 baskets of fragments left over. There was enough to feed them another day. They saw with their eyes of logic and not with their eyes of faith and did not

think there was enough. They did not rely upon the power of God and his never failing generosity and as a result they did not realize that God will feed them now and there will always be enough to sustain them in the future as well.

Our Blessed Lord looks out at each of us who have come here with our burdens and pains. He sees us longing for love and acceptance. He knows our weaknesses and our needs and he is ready to take action to sustain us. He is ready to give us something to satisfy our hunger. But the gift he will give us will not only satisfy the hunger of our bodies but of our souls as well. The gift that he will give us will not only satisfy us but it will sustain us as we continue this pilgrim journey on earth. He offers us unleavened bread and wine. To our logical eyes it appears like normal bread and yet we only take a small piece and it appears like normal wine and yet we only take a small sip. Therefore most people would say it can't satisfy our hunger or sustain us. But when we see it with the eyes of faith. When we see it recognizing that with God nothing is impossible. When we see it knowing that God became man

and died upon a cross to redeem us then and only then do we know that it can satisfy every hunger and sustain us in this life. Because the bread that we receive and the wine that we take are the Body and Blood of our Lord. This great gift of the Eucharist will comfort us in our affliction, give us courage in our darkest hour, sustain us through the valley of death and deliver us to the gates of Heaven. This is the gift that was foreshadowed in the manna in the desert, and in our first reading and in the Gospel. This gift unites us as one body and reminds us that no matter what difficulties we face through our one faith in the one Lord we can overcome any obstacle and achieve any dream.