

August 3 - 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, God invites the thirsty and hungry to come to Him. You have to love a reading that includes the promise, "Heed me, and you shall eat well."

The Scriptures are full of references to *eating* as a symbol of sharing God's life. In the Old Testament, covenants were sealed with ritual meals, and salvation is described repeatedly as participating in the feast on God's holy mountain. God manifested His presence among his people through miraculous feedings of individuals and of thousands.

Jesus often used meals as the setting for teaching. His first miracle, changing water into wine, happened at a wedding feast. To the woman at the well, Jesus described the gift of *living water* that would flow in the hearts of those who believe in him. And, at the Last Supper, Jesus gave the apostles - and the Church - his Body and Blood as food and drink under the appearances of bread and wine.

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves appears in all four Gospels. It obviously made a deep impression on the early Christian community. Notice the presence of the clearly Eucharistic language in the account: Jesus *takes, blesses, breaks, and gives*. These same ritual words are repeated in the Eucharistic Prayer whenever we celebrate the Mass.

Besides the Eucharistic dimension of this miracle is the fact that Jesus works it using what the disciples have to offer. He begins by telling them to give the crowd some food themselves. The disciples do not think that they have enough to feed five thousand ... and they are right. By themselves, they do not have enough; but with Jesus, there will be an abundance. By entrusting what they have to the power of Jesus, they will be able to feed the hungry throng.

Of course, Jesus could have made it rain loaves and fishes. But he wanted to work this miracle with the help of the disciples. And really, that is the most common way in which God answers our prayers: through others. More often than not, God uses ordinary people to work miracles. That means that God wants to answer prayers through you and through me. God wants to use each of us as instruments of his love and mercy.

"But what do I have to offer?" you might ask. "Five loaves and two fish are all we have." That's enough for Jesus to work with. You and I are enough for Jesus to

work with. If we embrace with trust the faith that St. Paul so beautifully expresses in today's second reading, Jesus will work with us and through us. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." St. Paul says that he is convinced of this; are we convinced? Do we look at life through the eyes of faith or through the lens of skepticism?

St. Paul writes: "In all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us." This is the faith that emboldened the apostles, that strengthened the martyrs, that has inspired thousands upon thousands of Christians to spend their lives in witness to the power and presence of Jesus.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God asks: "Why spend your wages on what fails to satisfy?" On what do we spend our wages? On what do we spend our lives? What could be a better "investment" than the faith that assures us, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"? This is the treasure found in the field. This is the pearl of great price for which we should be willing to give our all.

All four gospel writers tell us at the conclusion of the account of the feeding of the five thousand that, "All ate and were satisfied." Jesus didn't provide each person with just a mouthful; there were twelve baskets filled with the fragments left over! "Heed me, and you shall eat well." God alone can satisfy the longing of our hearts, the hunger of our souls, and God satisfies with an abundance.

Money, pleasure, power ... ultimately, these fail to satisfy. They come and go. God's love makes the promise: "I will renew with you the everlasting covenant."

It is this everlasting, eternal covenant that is renewed in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "Take this, all of you, and eat of it; for this is my Body, which is given up for you ... Take this, all of you, and drink from it; for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you."

We offer to the Lord what we have, bread and wine, and He transforms them into the superabundant Food of his Son. If we offer to the Lord our selves, He will transform us, and use us, to feed a world starving for the truth we have to share: that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ the Lord.