

Homily of Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145:10-11,15-18; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15

According to Leviticus 2:12-15, the first-fruits were to be offered to the Lord. It was in the observance of this Jewish custom that the man in the first reading brought to Elisha twenty barley loaves of first-fruits and fresh ears of grain. Elisha had one hundred prophet apprentices (sons of the prophet) who were in training to become prophets. Elisha directed his servant, Gehazi, to give the offering to the sons of the prophet to eat. Gehazi, believing that the offering would not be enough objected, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" Elisha repeated his instruction that the loaves be given to the people; and Elisha prophesied, "For thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'" The reading concludes that the men ate and there were some left over as prophesied by Elisha.

When Jesus raised the idea of feeding the five thousand people, his disciples objected too. Philip questioned Jesus, "Where can we buy enough bread for them to eat. ... Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." Andrew wondered, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many." After Jesus blessed the five loaves and the two fish, the five thousand people ate and the left over filled twelve wicker baskets.

The readings teach us that God multiplies the little we are willing to share with one another. Let no one say, "What I have is insignificant, no need presenting it." Let us be like the man in the first reading who brought the offering to Elisha. Let us be like the boy in the gospel reading who brought five loaves and two fish. Let us allow God to use us as he used the man and the boy. It means that if we are generous and faithful with the little we have, much comes out of it because God steps in to bless and multiply it.

We can see in the readings that neither Elisha nor Jesus produced what the people ate. It was the little that was available and generously offered that God blessed and multiplied. There is no blessing and no multiplication where people are unwilling to share. What use is a person's wealth if the person does not allow God to bless other people with his or her wealth? What use is a person's talent and knowledge if the person does not share them with other people?

When we observe what the second reading calls "unity of the spirit" and "bond of peace," that is, come together and combine resources and efforts, much is achieved. The achievement that results from unity of the spirit and bond of peace is a form of 'multiplication of loaves.' The evidence of such multiplication of loaves are seen in families, communities, parishes, associations, and organizations where there is unity of the spirit and bond of peace. Many institutions and establishments grow to enormous size due to some individuals who come together in unity of the spirit and bond of peace, contribute, and combine their resources. The positive contributions of such institutions and establishments to the economy of their country and wellbeing of many people is a form of 'multiplication of loaves.'

In the Gospel, Jesus instructed his disciples to, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." By this, Jesus teaches us that it is wrong and sinful to be wasteful. It is unfortunate and sad to see so much wastefulness in our society. In some countries, there is so much accumulation and hoarding of wealth by the political and economic rulers while the citizens are impoverished and hungry. This is wrong and sinful. There are, also, some clergy men and women who accumulate and hoard so much wealth while neglecting the poor. In fact, some of the clergy men and women enrich themselves with extorting from the poor and the feeble minded. This is wrong and sinful. There is so much wastage in some parts of the world while millions in other parts of the world die from impoverishment. This is wrong and sinful. If what is hoarded, wrongly accumulated, and what is wasted are distributed to the needy, poverty will be reduced to the barest minimum all over the world, and millions of lives will be saved.

Also, eating or drinking more than the body requires, wasting food, dumping or trashing usable items, acquiring and hoarding more than necessary, spending and purchasing unnecessarily, extravagance, laziness, and so on are types of wastefulness. They are wrong and sinful. Jesus instructs us, "Gather fragments leftover, so that nothing will be wasted." O Lord, grant us a generous heart and the spirit of sharing, and deliver us from the demons of greediness and wastefulness. Amen.

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