

Homily of Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 made from first-fruits and fresh ears of grain. Elisha had one hundred prophet apprentices (sons of the prophets) who were in training to become prophets. Elisha directed his servant, Gehazi, to give the offering to the sons of the prophets to eat. Gehazi, presuming 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 willingly and generously share with one another. Let no one say, "What I have is insignificant, no need presenting it." Every little drop counts. 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. Much comes out from what we willingly and generously share with one another.

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.

When the widow of Zarephath offered to Elijah from a handful of flour and a little oil remained for herself and her son, God stepped in to multiply, the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry until the day when the Lord sent rain upon the earth (1 King 17:10-16).

There is 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?

The second reading speaks of “unity of the spirit through bond of peace.” If there is unity of the spirit through bond of peace in families, communities, parishes, associations, and organizations, much is achieved. Unity of the spirit through bond of peace enables pooling talents and resources together and results in multiplication of good things. Much is lost where there is conflict and disunity.

In the gospel, Jesus instructed his disciples, “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 wrong and sinful for the rich and the privileged to accumulate wealth and live wasteful and extravagant life while there are people dying from hunger and poverty. If what is hoarded and 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. Wastefulness includes excess consumption of food and drinks, throwing out consumable food and usable items, laziness, time wasting, lack of discipline and restraint in spending money and using resources, and so on.

When the people ate, as the first reading and the gospel reading tell us, there were left over. The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry for the Zarephath widow and her son. May God also visit us with his multiplying power in our areas of want and need. Amen and amen!

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