

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 2, 2020

God has been feeding people for a long time. God sent bread from heaven, called manna, to feed the Israelites on their trek through the desert led by Moses. In today's first scripture reading, the prophet Isaiah delivered another divine dinner invitation as God said: "Come to eat well, come to be renewed, come have life in me and it's free!" In today's Gospel, Jesus takes His unique place in a long line of divine interventions by feeding five thousand people in a deserted place. It becomes clear that God is concerned about the whole human person, body and soul.

For the past few weeks the Sunday liturgy Gospel selections from St. Matthew have been about Jesus nourishing the souls of people with parables. These important stories feed our hope and encourage our imaginations with the wonderful possibilities of God's Kingdom. In today's Gospel, Jesus, moved with pity for the crowd following Him, healed the sick and fed the people with a miraculous meal of God's abundance. Jesus made it clear that God, in fact does take care of His people. And He does so not grudgingly, but with joy. God meant it when He said, "I will be your God, and you will be my people."

The miracle feeding of five thousand people points to the Eucharist, another miracle of divine nourishment. It's another example of God's care for His people. In celebrating the Eucharist, we are similar to the hungry people in the desert. Christ does not send us away to fend for ourselves. Instead he continues to call us around the holy table, as much as is even possible these days, to be fed with His presence in word and sacrament.

This miracle has both divine and human fingerprints all over it. Not only because of Jesus, Son of God, and Son of Mary. But because of the conversation Jesus had with the disciples. When they suggested that the solution to the problem of five thousand hungry people far from home was to send them away, Jesus said: "give them some food yourselves." They didn't realize that He was inviting them to participate in a miracle. He could have done the miracle directly and alone. But He didn't. He chose to use the little they had. When blest by Christ whatever we offer is always more than enough. A little time, a little patience, a little courage, a little generosity.

Christ continues to use whatever we have to make God's love and compassion more visible and more available to people in need. These days most everyone is carrying extra burdens caused by Covid19. Charles Dickens once said: "No one is useless in this world, who helps to lighten the burden of another human being." Christ would agree. It is our challenge to lighten the burdens of one another whenever and however we can, even if we feel we don't have enough to do what needs to be done. Christ may invite us to become part of a miracle in someone's life this week. To such an invitation how could we say "no."

Fr. Valentine

Scripture Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/080220.cfm>