

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

25 JULY 2021

REAINGS: 2 Kings 4:42-44 Ephesians 4:1-6 John 6:1-15

Why have the crowds come to Jesus? They have heard of his wisdom but also they have witnessed his healing power as he ministered to the sick. They are eager for more and so they follow him, even crossing the Sea of Galilee to pursue him. Jesus climbs the hillside and sits down to teach the people with authority at some length, as we heard last week. The hillside brings to mind Moses' meeting with God on Mount Sinai when God feeds the People on their journey across the desert with manna, bread from heaven. But there is also an awareness in Jesus that having fed their hearts and minds he must not ignore their physical needs, for they are hungry. 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' he asks Philip who tells him it would require at least 200 denarii to give them only a small piece each; at which point Andrew has discovered a young boy who has brought his packed lunch with him, five loaves and two fish. To their horror Jesus tells the disciples to get the crowd to sit down, 5000 of them! In getting them to sit down, Jesus treats them as free persons with dignity, not like servants, forced to eat standing and hurriedly to be at their master's disposal. Jesus then gives thanks and distributes the loaves and fish to the crowd himself so that all had as much as they wanted; they are filled with the goodness of God. Not only that but he then instructs the disciples to collect what is left over and we see the enormity of what he has done, twelve hampers full! How abundant is God's goodness. The number itself being significant as we recall the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve Apostles and the entire people.

Sadly the people have misunderstood the meaning of what Jesus has done. They take Jesus to be the fulfilment of their material hopes and ambitions. They recognise in Jesus the prophet beyond all prophets promised by Moses but expect Jesus to be a nationalist messiah who will set them free from Roman domination just as Moses had freed the people from the slavery of Egypt. The people see the sign Jesus has given but mistake its significance and he is forced to flee to prevent them seeking to try and make him an earthly

King. Yes, he is a King but as he will later explain to Pilate, 'My is not a kingdom of this world.'

'In today's first reading we recall how Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves. But even this great miracle was surpassed when Jesus fed five thousand with only five loaves. Jesus took the meagre offerings of a small boy and invested them with divine power for the feeding of so many. The loaves were of barley, food of the poor. It was an anticipation of how God takes our poor offerings in the Eucharist and returns them to us in divine life.' (Sylvester O'Flynn). It is also a reminder to us that what we offer to God in love can become by his power an offering of significance; for love always means abundance. In the face of the needs of our world we may feel powerless but many seemingly insignificant offerings can together, when given in love, have a profound impact. The Food Bank is a powerful example of this. It is also a reminder to us that hunger and starvation are the lot of many of our brothers and sister across the globe who go to bed hungry each night and that, as one of the wealthy countries in the world, we are the only one that has decided to cut our contribution to the needs of the poorest having promised at the election that we would not do so. Often it is the poor who shame us by their generosity. St Teresa of Calcutta said some years ago that once in India she came across a family that had not eaten for days. It was a Hindu family. She took a small amount of rice and gave it to them. Before she knew what was happening the mother of the family divided the rice into two halves and took one half to the family next door, who happened to be Muslims, saying, 'But they haven't eaten for days either.' Of such is greatness, seeing beyond one's own needs to the needs of others; real love in action. It reminds us of the generosity of the lad in the gospel who handed over his packed lunch to the Lord and who must have been overwhelmed when he saw what Jesus did with his small but vital contribution. His comparatively small gift was essential to the action of the Lord. What is the Lord asking of you and me which he wants to use in proclaiming the gospel and making real the presence of the Kingdom?

In the coming weeks St John will continue to expound for us Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist in which the offerings that we bring to the altar become for us not earthly food but the very life of Jesus laid down for us on the cross and raised in glory so that we might become loving sustenance for our brothers

and sisters, having been transformed by him whom we have received. More and more the Lord seeks to make more obvious in us his real presence which transfigured us in our baptism. As the gifts are brought to the altar for our celebration of the Mass we unite ourselves with them so that the Lord can make real in us those words the priest says when preparing the Chalice. 'By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.' How graced we are by Jesus' giving of his life for us that we might become his gift to others in his name. May we be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and sensitive to the needs of others that the glory of the Lord may be clearly seen in what we say and do in love.

God bless you,

Fr Hugh