

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday (A)

- In every Mass we pray at the offering of our gifts of bread & wine, "Father, we offer you these gifts of bread & wine, & ask that they may become for us our spiritual food & drink."
- It's a beautiful liturgical prayer, but it is a dangerous one: if we mean by it that the eucharist is only a kind of spiritual food for our own individual interior spiritual needs, with no connection whatsoever to earthly food & the physical hunger of the millions of hungry people in the world, then we are missing the point of the eucharist.
- So it is with the eucharistic celebration that if it is only spiritual in such a way that it is something separate from the actual feeding of the hungry in the world – then the eucharistic celebration is lifeless & has no real value.
- Our eucharistic bread will be true spiritual food for us **only** when it leads us to the actual feeding of physical bread to the hungry & if it leads us to exercise care & justice for those in need.
- This is what the gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves really means.
- It is directed right at us in the practical challenge that Jesus puts when he says, "*Give them something to eat yourselves.*"
- You, yourselves, give them something to eat.
- Too often we focus on the miracle of transformation that occurs in Matthew's Gospel when all he tells about the actual miracle is that Jesus 'breaks & shares'.
- Matthew is more interested in the leftovers than he is in the miracle itself. From five loaves & two fish we are told twelve baskets of scraps are left over.
- The twelve baskets of scraps, the remnants of the meal at which all were filled & satisfied, echo the sign of God through the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament.
- For us today this story also has consoling resonance. Matthew is telling us that Jesus sees our need, does not turn us away, comes to where we are, as we are, & recreates us through the abundance of his love, so we can be signs of His kingdom in the world.
- The Church has always believed that the feeding of the crowd prefigured the Eucharist, this weekly time where we receive the fullness of God in his Word, in the life of the community, in the minister & through the transformation of the Bread & Wine.
- It's all about abundance. Our God has abundantly provided for us so that we can abundantly provide for all the world which is given into our care. 'Those to whom much is given, much is required.' The problem is that when we look around we see that while some of us have so much, others have nothing at all.

- If this reality doesn't move us to a change of heart & right action then we have not understood the story of the loaves & the fish, that God's goodness is never intended for a select few.
- The direct feeding & helping of as many individual hungry people as we can is an essential part of Christianity.
- And we in this parish do this - through the several collections we have during the year, & our bringing of food to the church for the Asylum seekers & for the Poor Man's Mass.
- But we also have a mission to actively lobby in the Government to bring about radical changes that will affect the root causes of hunger, & bring about a just distribution of food for all.
- If a brother or sister has nothing to wear & no food for the day, & you say to them, 'Good-bye & good luck, keep warm & well fed,' but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that?
- So it is with the faith that does nothing in practice: it is thoroughly lifeless.
- But there are also other forms of hunger we are called to address, for those in any way on the margins & those who hunger for healthy relationships.
- Initially the disciples are sensitive to the people's hunger.
- They feel something of Jesus' compassion, but their response is to send the people away so that they can buy something for themselves.
- Jesus instructs them as today he instructs us: 'There is no need for them to go away; you give them something to eat yourselves'.
- Jesus asks them to give their resources to him: Bring your loaves & fish here to me! Bring me your bread & wine.
- Bring me whatever gifts you have, but Come to me.
- He then turns to God in prayer, his heart moved in praise & thanks, for he knows that he can 'do nothing on his own'.
- Then he breaks the loaves & gives them to the disciples for them to distribute to the hungry crowd.
- With our little resources how can we meet the needs of those who ask for our love? But nothing is impossible to God.
- Our talents, our hands, our hearts, our love, our acts of service can bring sustenance to a hungry world.
- As our gifts are transformed into Jesus, may we too, become holy, so that we can take Jesus to all those hungry people who are longing for him even though they may not realise it.
- The measure of our capacity to do this is not determined by our resources.
- It is measured by our longing & our willingness to draw near to God & allow him to embrace us in his love & love others through us.