

## Synopsis of O.T. XVII [B] Sunday (July 26) Jn 6: 1-15(L/15)

**Introduction:** Today's readings invite us to become humble instruments in God's hands by sharing our blessings with our needy brothers and sisters. They also remind us that if our country has been blessed with an abundance of earthly bread or with the technical capabilities to produce such abundance, then these gifts are for sharing with the hungry people and poor countries. Once physical hungers are satisfied, then we are challenged to satisfy the deeper hungers, for love, mercy, forgiveness, companionship, peace and fulfillment.

**Scripture lessons:** The first reading tells us how the prophet Elisha, by invoking God's power, fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves. This miracle foreshadowed the gospel account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowd who followed him to hear his words. Today's psalm gives us the assurance that it is "*the hand of the Lord that feeds us,*" and that it is God who "*answers all our needs.*" In the second reading, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians that Jesus united the Jews and the Gentiles by bringing them together as Christians in *one faith and one baptism*, and, hence, they have to live together, helping each other by sharing their blessings. Paul urges us to become communities of sharing Christians. The miraculous feeding of the five thousand people by Jesus, using five barley loaves and two fish, as described in today's gospel, is associated with the Holy Eucharist early in the Church's tradition. The people immediately interpreted the miracle, giving Jesus two Messianic titles: "*The prophet*" and "*the one who is to come.*" This miracle teaches us that God works marvels through ordinary people. Elisha's servant and Jesus' disciples distributed the bread provided by God through generous people who were willing to share their food with the hungry. Thus, God meets the needs of people through the good will and services provided by members of His community.

**Life messages:** A challenge to generous sharing: 1) The gospel story teaches that Jesus meets the most basic human need, namely hunger, with generosity and compassion. 2) Today's readings also tell us that God really cares about His people and that there is enough and more than enough for everybody. Studies show that the world today produces enough food grains to provide every human being on the planet with 3,600 calories a day, not counting such foods as tuber crops, vegetables, beans, nuts, fruits, meats, and fish. Hence, let us pray and work for better social justice in all communities and countries. 3) As Christians we need to commit ourselves to share and to work with God in communicating His compassion to all as the early Christians did. God always blesses those who share their blessings and talents with loving commitment. We can begin our own humble efforts at "sharing" right in our parish by participating in the works of charity done by organizations like St. Vincent DePaul Society, the Knights of Columbus etc. (L/12)

O.T. XVII [B] (July 29): 2 Kings 4:42-44, Eph 4:1-6, John 6:1-15

**Anecdote:** #1: "No my son, the pigs of my village don't pray before meals!" Monsignor Arthur Tonne has a funny story on today's gospel lesson. A village farmer stopped at a restaurant in the nearby town and sat near a group of young fellows who were acting up, shouting at the cook and heckling the waitress. When his meal was set before him the old farmer bowed his head to offer a prayer. One of the smart-alecks thought he would have some fun with the old farmer. So he shouted in a loud voice that could be heard by everyone, "Hey, Pop, does everyone do this where you come from?" Calmly the old man turned towards the lad with an innocent smile and replied in an equally loud voice: "No son, our pigs don't." Today's gospel tells us that, before feeding the five thousand, Jesus took the loaves of bread, gave thanks (to God his Father) and distributed them.

#2: A bag of rice to share: From her personal experience, Mother Teresa relates a story showing how the poor are more generous than the rich because they have experienced hunger and poverty. Learning of a poor Hindu family in Calcutta who had been starving for many days, Mother Theresa visited them and brought a big parcel of rice to the mother. She was surprised to see how the mother divided the rice into two equal portions and went out with one bundle to give it to her Moslem neighbor. When she returned, Mother Theresa asked her why she had done such a generous deed. The woman replied: "My family can manage with half the rice in this bag. My neighbor's family has several children and they are also starving." Today's gospel tells the story of a small boy who showed this same kind of generosity. By sharing his small lunch (which consisted of five barley loaves and two dried fish), he became the instrument in Jesus' working of a miracle that fed thousands.

# 3: "I wish I could be a brother like that:" Paul had received a special pre- Christmas gift from his rich brother. It was a beautiful new car - fully loaded and ready to go. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street kid was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. "Is this your car, mister?" the kid asked. When he replied that it was and that his brother had given it to him for Christmas, the boy said, "You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn't cost you anything? Free? For nothing? Gosh, I wish..." The boy hesitated, and Paul knew what he was about to say. He had heard it many times over the past few days. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the boy said shocked Paul. "*I wish*", the boy said, "*I wish I could be a brother like that.*" We can be a brother like that or a sister like that. All it takes is that we offer ourselves and what we have, to God. All it takes is that we cease to worry about how little we have and begin instead to think about what it is that we can offer to others, as the little boy in today's gospel story did by sharing his bread and fish with the multitude through Jesus. ("Chicken Soup" series).

**Introduction:** Today's readings invite us to become humble instruments in God's hands by sharing our blessings with our needy brothers and sisters. Miracles can happen through our

hands, when we collect and distribute to the needy the food destined for all by our generous God. Today's readings also remind us that if we have been blessed with an abundance of earthly bread or with the technical capabilities to produce such an abundance, then these gifts are for sharing with the hungry. When physical hungers are satisfied, then we are challenged to satisfy the deeper hungers - for love, mercy, forgiveness, companionship, peace and fulfillment. The first reading tells us how the prophet Elisha, by invoking God's power, fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves. This miracle foreshadowed the gospel account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowd who followed him to hear his words. Today's psalm tells us: "*The hand of the Lord feeds us; God answers all our needs.*" In the second reading, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians that Jesus united the Jews and the Gentiles, bringing them together as Christians in *one faith and one baptism*. Hence, he urges them to keep this unity intact as *one body and one spirit* by living as true Christians, "*bearing with one another through love,*" in *humility, gentleness, patience and peace*. If we become such a community, nobody will go hungry, and God will meet the needs of people through the services provided by members of our community. The miraculous feeding of the five thousand people by Jesus, with five barley loaves and two fish, as described in today's gospel, is associated in Church tradition with the Holy Eucharist. John's version of the miracle clearly heightens the Eucharistic allusions when we read it along with the miraculous feeding of 100 men by the prophet Elisha in today's first reading. But unlike Elisha, Jesus himself assumed the divine role, feeding the people with eschatological plenty. The reaction of the people was immediate and unanimous; they interpreted the miracle as a messianic sign and gave Jesus two Messianic titles: "*The prophet*" and "*the one who is to come.*" This miracle teaches us that God works marvels through ordinary people. Elisha's servant and Jesus' disciples distributed the bread, provided by God. Thus, God meets the needs of the people through the services provided by the members of His community.

**First reading, 2 Kings 4:42-44:** The first reading, taken from the Second Book of Kings, prepares us for today's gospel which describes the miraculous feeding of more than five thousand people by Jesus using a boy's gift of five barley loaves and two dried fish. Acting through the prophet Elisha, God fed about 100 people with 20 barley loaves. Both incidents tell us that God works marvels through ordinary people and meets the needs of people through the services provided by members of the community. The Fathers of the Church recognized this miraculous feeding of Elisha as a type of, and prelude for, Jesus' feeding of the multitudes in today's gospel, an event that itself foreshadowed his gift of Himself in the Eucharist which continues to nourish believers. The paired readings challenge the Church to continue Elisha's and Jesus' tradition by becoming, with His power, a provider and multiplier of bread for the poor.

**Second Reading, Ephesians 4:1-6:** St. Paul, in prison, reminds the Ephesians that Jesus united the Jews and the Gentiles, bringing them together as Christians in *one faith and one baptism*. Hence, he advises them to keep this unity intact as *one body and one spirit* by living as true Christians "*bearing with one another in love,*" with *humility, gentleness,*

*patience and peace.* At present, we are the community that Paul describes. We are the ones called to feed the hungry today. As members of the body of Christ, we need to remember that miracles can happen through our prayers, our donations and our hands when we help Him to distribute to the hungry the food destined for all by our generous God.

**Exegesis:** The context: Jesus' withdrawals into the wilderness were probably intended to provide periods of rest and reflection for Jesus and his disciples, and a time for him to teach them privately. In addition, withdrawal might have allowed them to avoid danger from those hostile to him, particularly after the execution of John the Baptist. Today's gospel shows us one such incident, Here, we see Jesus trying, in vain, to withdraw with his apostles from the crowds at Capernaum by sailing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus stepped ashore near a remote village called Bethsaida Julius, where the River Jordan flows into the north end of the Sea of Galilee, and faced a large crowd of people who had pursued him around the Sea on foot. His immediate reaction was one of deep compassion. Near the place where they had landed, there was a small grassy plain, and there he began to heal the sick among them and to teach them at length. This was the scene of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand as described in today's gospel.

A great miracle before a multitude: The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is found in all four gospels, although the context and emphasis vary. This is the only miracle, other than the resurrection, that is told in all the gospels, a fact that speaks of its importance to the early Church. Compare Mark 6:35-44 with Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:1-14. Matthew says that there were about 5,000 men, not including women and children. This miraculous feeding in the desert had precedents: Moses, Elijah and Elisha had fed people without resources. The present miracle resembles particularly the one performed by Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44. In both cases, unlike the manna in the desert, there were leftovers, for everyone there had had enough and more than enough. This miracle, then, is greater than the manna of the exodus. The Gospel story should be treated as a witness to the power of God and an implicit declaration of Jesus' divinity. It also shows how, to this day, Jesus empowers his disciples to continue his works of compassion. We may regard the incident both as a miracle of divine providence and also as a messianic sign in which Jesus multiplied loaves and fish in order to feed his hungry listeners. The lesson for every Christian is that, no matter how impossible his or her assignments may seem, with divine help they can be done because "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

A messianic sign or a miracle of generous sharing? The traditional teaching of the Church is that Jesus literally multiplied the bread and fish to feed his hungry listeners. C. S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, says that this is simply God doing in microcosm what God does all of the time in macrocosm. At the beginning of this century in his classic book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer suggested that what we have here is a "sacrament" rather than a full meal. All the people received was the merest crumb of food, and yet, somehow, with Jesus present among them, it was enough. That, however, does not explain the baskets full

of leftovers from the five loaves and two fish. A few bible scholars even suggest that the "miracle" may be interpreted also as Jesus' success in getting a group of selfish people to share their personal provisions with others. According to this interpretation, it appears strange and unnatural that the crowd had made this nine-mile long expedition to such a desolate village without taking anything to eat. When people set out on a journey, they usually took their food with them in a small basket called a *kophinah* or in a bigger wicker basket. But if they had done so in this case, each one might have been unwilling to share what he had brought with others. If such were the case, Jesus might have deliberately accepted the five loaves and fish from the little boy in order to set a good example for the crowd. Moved by this example of generosity, the crowd might have done the same: thus, there could have been enough for all. This view was propounded by the famous preacher-novelist Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe*. This rather fanciful explanation may still be considered a "miracle": it might show that how the example of the boy responding to Jesus "miraculously" turned a crowd of selfish men and women into a fellowship of generous sharers. It does, however, militate against the Divinity of Jesus, True God and True Man. For it is the literal interpretation of the miracle which makes the miracle a messianic sign with Eucharistic reference, points to the Divinity of Christ and offers an example of God's love for us, expressed in superabundant generosity.

A symbol of the Eucharist: No Bible scholar doubts that all six bread miracles in the gospels are about the Eucharist. The multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle from Jesus' public ministry narrated in all four Gospels with Eucharistic overtones. The early Christian community saw this event as anticipating the Eucharist. John uses this story in his gospel to introduce Jesus' profound and extended reflection on the Eucharist and the Bread of Life. The Cycle B lectionary has selected portions from John chapter 6 for five Sundays to remind us of Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist. The Eucharistic coloring of the multiplication of bread is clear in Jesus' *blessing, breaking, and giving* the loaves. Thus, the miracle itself becomes a symbol of the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity. The sharing of the broken bread is a sign of a community that is expected to share and provide in abundance for the needs of its members. Matthew invites us to see this miracle as a type or symbol explaining the sacrament's meaning. Clearly the account suggests the early Christian rite of *the breaking of the bread*, celebrated daily (Acts 2), rather than the covenant-sacrifice meal, or the annual Jewish Passover celebration, or the yearly Christian Paschal celebration. This daily breaking of the bread also had eschatological associations: it was an anticipation of the *messianic banquet*. The Church's Eucharist today combines both the sacrificial and the eschatological associations. In the recent past, emphasis has been placed more on the sacrificial than on the eschatological aspect, but the imbalance is now being redressed.

Life messages: #1: "You give them something to eat." The gospel story teaches that Jesus meets the most basic human need, hunger, with generosity and compassion. Today's readings also tell us that God really cares about His people and that there is enough and more than enough for everybody. Studies show that the world today produces enough food grains to provide every human being on the planet with 3,600 calories a day, not counting

such foods as tuber crops, vegetables, beans, nuts, fruits, meats, and fish. Over the past twenty five years, food production has exceeded world population growth by about 16%. This means that there is no good reason for any human being in today's world to go hungry. But even in a rich country like U.S.A., one child out of five grows up in poverty, three million people are homeless and 4000 unborn babies are aborted every day. "The problem in feeding the world's hungry population lies with our political lack of will, our economic system biased in favor of the affluent, our militarism, and our tendency to blame the victims of social tragedies such as famine. We all share responsibility for the fact that populations are undernourished. Therefore, it is necessary to arouse a sense of responsibility in individuals, especially among those more blessed with this world's goods." (Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) 157-58).

#2: We need to commit ourselves to share with others, and to work with God in communicating His compassion. It is too easy to blame God, too easy to blame governments, too easy see these things as other people's problems. They are also our problems. That is the meaning of the Eucharist we celebrate here today. In other words, as Christians we need to commit ourselves to share what we have with others, and to work with God in communicating his compassion to all.

God is a caring Father and He wants our co-operation to be part of His caring for all of us, His children. That's what the early Christians did, generously sharing what they had with the needy. They were convinced that everything they needed to experience a fulfilling life was already there, in the gifts and talents of the people around them. People of our time need to be encouraged to share, even when they think they have nothing to offer. Whatever we offer through Jesus will have a life-giving effect in those who receive it. We are shown two attitudes in the Gospel story: that of Philip and that of Andrew (John 6:7-9). Philip said, in effect: "The situation is hopeless; nothing can be done." But Andrew's attitude was: "I'll see what I can do; and I will trust Jesus to do the rest." Let us have Andrew's attitude.

#3: God blesses those who share their talents, with loving commitment. This is illustrated by Mother Teresa who went to serve the slum dwellers of Calcutta with just twenty cents in her pocket. When she died forty-nine years later, God had turned those original twenty cents into eighty schools, three hundred mobile dispensaries, seventy leprosy clinics, thirty homes for the dying, thirty homes for abandoned children and forty thousand volunteers from all over the world to help her. We can begin our own humble efforts at "sharing" right in our parish by participating in the works of charity done by organizations like the St. Vincent DePaul Society, the Knights of Columbus and so many other volunteer groups. We may say, "I do not have enough money or talent to make any difference". But we need to remember that the small boy in the story had only five barley loaves and two dried fish. The Bible guarantees that every believer has at least one gift from the Holy Spirit. This is our one "tiny fish". Perhaps our "fish" is not money, but a talent or an ability that God has given us. We all have something. If you have never trusted God with your time, or your talent, or your treasure...all your resources...this is the time to start. Let us offer ourselves and

whatever we have to God saying, "Here is what I am and what I have Lord; use me; use it." And He will bless us and bless our offering, amplifying it beyond our expectations. When we give what we have to God, and we ask Him to bless it, it is then the miracle happens. We, too, can perform wonders in our own time and place, by practicing the four "Eucharistic verbs" of Jesus: Take humbly and generously what God gives us, bless it by offering it to others in God's love, break it off from our own needs and interests for the sake of others, give it away with joy-filled gratitude to God who has blessed us with so much.

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