

Taking, Blessing, Breaking, and Sharing

August 2, 2020, Eighteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 14:13-21
Fr. John

The common element uniting all three readings of today's liturgy is that they are encouraging and positive messages given in times of hopelessness and despondency.

The prophet, Isaiah reminds his people of God's abiding presence even after they have been in exile in Babylon for almost 70 years. Paul, telling the Christian community in Rome that Christ's love will never be overcome even by the worst hardships and persecutions they have endured. Jesus, just having heard about his cousin John's execution at the hands of Herod and needing some personal grieving time, is still able to feed five thousand people who invade his need for some privacy.

It's important for us to acknowledge the context of these readings because that is the context in which many people are experiencing life today.

The isolation fatigue due to the corona virus pandemic is taking its toll on the psychological health of many. It has further exacerbated the hopelessness and despair of others due to unemployment, racial and social discrimination. In our own city and province there have been more deaths by suicide and drug overdose than by the corona virus.

So the social environment in which we live sees many living lives of deep desperation, not unlike those who had gathered around Jesus, hungering and thirsting both physically and spiritually for some good reason to keep on living.

It's interesting, but not altogether surprising that the actions which Jesus takes in this situation parallels those of the Last Supper and subsequently of the Eucharist that we celebrate. Specifically the actions of **TAKING, BLESSING, BREAKING** and **SHARING**.

In some ways, these are the very actions that we ourselves are asked to carry out if the message of Christ is going to be mediated through us to a spiritually starving world. 'You give them something to eat,' Jesus says to his disciples as he says to us.

So how do we do that?

We do it by both our attitudes and our actions.

The disciples had a defeatist attitude - 'How can we feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish?' The odds seem overwhelming and life does seem to short change us at times. Accidents, illnesses among other things, may severely limit our human potential. Jesus, however, was willing to 'play the cards dealt to him' - in this case five loaves and two fish. Instead of lamenting the lack of resources available to him he says in effect, 'Okay let's see what we can do with what we've got.' It was an attitude of acceptance - as when the elements of bread and wine are brought to the Eucharistic

table followed by a prayer of gratitude: 'Blessed are you Lord God of all creation for through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer... it will become for us- the bread of life and our spiritual drink'. Basically the prayer of blessing becomes and acknowledgment that God always provides what we need- not necessarily what we initially wanted or expected.

Jesus then breaks the bread. This breaking [and in the Mass the pouring of the wine] should move us to ponder the sacrifices that have been made on our behalf over a lifetime by family, friends and even strangers that have enhanced our lives. Christ's love has impelled others to do these things for us so that we might have life- life in abundance and that we might do likewise. Perhaps it's only in our brokenness that we allow the light of Christ to shine through.

Finally, the broken bread and pieces of fish were distributed and shared among ALL the people. This tells us that we don't come to God as 'rugged individuals' only worried about our personal salvation. No one is to be left behind. We all cross the finish line together. That's what Church is supposed to be all about. When we receive communion -it is a 'common union' not only with the body and blood of Christ but also with each other. If we don't see that- then we have missed the whole point!

Some biblical scholars have interpreted the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in somewhat less than the spectacular 'Hollywood' terms that would really 'wow' audiences. They suggest that perhaps the multiplication did not necessarily occur because Jesus snapped his fingers but because people were moved enough to willingly share the little food they may have brought with those who had nothing. Could this transformation of a mentality of hoarding for oneself to that of sharing with others be a miracle in itself?

I suppose it's up to you and me to decide which interpretation works best.