

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

2 Kings 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, and fresh grain in the ear.

Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat."

But his servant objected,

"How can I set this before a hundred people?"

Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat."

"For thus says the LORD,

"They shall eat and there shall be some left over."

And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

R. (cf. 16) The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you,
and you give them their food in due season;
you open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The LORD is just in all his ways
and holy in all his works.

The LORD is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Reading 2

Ephesians 4:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

I, a prisoner for the Lord,
urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,
with all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another through love,
striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:
one body and one Spirit,
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Alleluia

Luke 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has risen in our midst.

God has visited his people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee.
A large crowd followed him,
because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick.
Jesus went up on the mountain,
and there he sat down with his disciples.
The Jewish feast of Passover was near.
When Jesus raised his eyes
and saw that a large crowd was coming to him,
he said to Philip,
["Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"](#)
He said this to test him,
because he himself knew what he was going to do.
Philip answered him,
"Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough
for each of them to have a little."
One of his disciples,
Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish;
but what good are these for so many?"
Jesus said, "Have the people recline."
Now there was a great deal of grass in that place.
So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.
Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,
and distributed them to those who were reclining,
and also as much of the fish as they wanted.
When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples,
"Gather the fragments left over,
so that nothing will be wasted."
So they collected them,
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments
from the five barley loaves
that had been more than they could eat.
When the people saw the sign he had done, they said,
"This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."
Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off
to make him king,
he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Exegesis

2 Kings 4:42-44

1 and 2 Kings are the final part of what tradition calls the Former Prophets (Josh, Judg, 1-2 Sam). Together they cover a period from the time when they first settled the Promised Land under King Joshua until the Babylonian Exile. The overarching concern of the Prophets was the fidelity or infidelity of the people and their leaders fidelity or lack thereof to the covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Ultimately the complete destruction of both Israel and Judah would be blamed on the infidelity of the people influenced by poor leadership.

Our pericope today can be dated approximately 849 to 842 B.C. 2 Kings 4:1 – 8:15 consists of a compilation of ten legends, including miracle stories attributed to the Prophet Elisha. Our passage today is the fourth in this series. It is preceded by the following: *The Widow's Plight*, *The Shunammite Woman*, and *Elisha Counteracts Food Poisoning*. The preceding miracles include an abundant unending flow of oil for the widow, a miraculous birth and subsequent raising of the dead child, and saving of the people from poison. The fourth story in this series is the miraculous feeding of 100 men. It may be interesting to note that the miraculous feeding story in John's Gospel is also the fourth of a series of 7 signs or miracles.

Baal-shalishah was approximately ten miles southwest of Samaria. Some biblical experts claim that this event occurred during a time of famine. Barley was considered the food of the poor. If this is 10% of the first fruits of this man's crop it would seem to be a very meager crop which would magnify the sacrifice that he is making in a time of great need. The servant, like the Gospel account, objects with doubt relative to the ability to feed so many with so little. Elisha calmly reassures the servant that God is in charge, and He will feed them and there will be food left over. With God there is no finitude; there are no limits to the flow of God's grace.

Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

Psalm 145 is titled *The Greatness and Goodness of God*. The mighty works of God can be seen and experienced. Verses 1-9 describe the greatness of God as a great king using phrases like: mighty works, majestic glory, great deeds, and fearsome power.

Verse 10 then proclaims thanksgiving that flows from God's mighty works and our response of praise and gratitude. The song abounds in praise and thanksgiving for the graciousness of God. The psalm parallels the gift of food that nourishes our bodies with the gift of Spirit that fulfills all our desires. God's hand is open wide for all, and His greatness and goodness have no bounds.

Exegesis (Continued)

Ephesians 4:1-6

From the earliest of Old Testament theology and from the most ancient Greek philosophy human beings could posit the Oneness of God. In fact, Greek philosophers referred to God as the One. The One was the first principle, the One was from whom all of creation came into being, the One was He who ordered all things from the beginning of time, and who continues to hold all of creation together in an orderly fashion. These are thoughts that are articulated from the mind of reason. God similarly reveals Himself to His chosen people as one, as being itself, the source of all that is.

There is one Spirit and so we all share in the same Spirit. Every human soul is a unique vessel, an earthen vessel able to share in and possess that one Spirit. Our passage from *Ephesians* is calling us to live in the unity of that Spirit. Because believers are baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13), their union is displayed in the oneness of their faith (creed), life (code), and worship (cult).¹

John 6:1-15

The Lectionary readings of the Church move from Mark's Gospel last Sunday where Jesus looked out and saw the large crowd that had gathered, and He was moved to the depth of His being because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The next scene in Mark's Gospel is the *Feeding of the Five Thousand*. The Church now turns to the beautiful *Bread of Life Discourse* in John's Gospel which begins with the *Feeding of the Five Thousand*, our passage this Sunday.

It is springtime in Galilee. It is Passover time. It is the second of three times that this annual feast is mentioned in John's Gospel (2:13, 6:4, 11:55). The following year Jesus will become the Passover Lamb. The location is the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Experts surmise that Jesus has crossed from the southern west side of the lake to the northern west side. The fact that the crowds followed Him on foot would suggest this location as we are told that He crossed to the other side by boat.

Jesus, as John always portrays Him, knew what He was about to do. He is in charge and in control. Yet, He asks the question, saying to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" This question echoes the words of Moses to Yahweh in the desert, "Where can I get meat to feed all these people?" (Num 11:13). It also echoes the servant confronting Elisha in the feeding of the 100 men. (2 Kgs 4:43). An awareness of scarcity and the limitations of finitude are open for all to see.

Jesus instructs that the people recline on the green grass. As we recall the words of Jesus, "they were like sheep without a shepherd", the green grass evokes the image of verse 2 of the 23rd Psalm, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Thus, they are in a place and a position to be fed by the Good Shepherd.

1, The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible; The New Testament; Ignatius Press; S.F.; page 349.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 6:1-15

We are told that there were five thousand men which reflects the patristic nature of the culture of the time. Five thousand men suggests that there were twenty to twenty-five thousand people counting women and children.

There was a lad there who had 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. A lad would describe a boy 10-12 years old. Presumably he was there with his family. Barley bread was the food of the poor. Perhaps the boy was holding on to all the food that his family had to eat. He gave all that he had to Jesus. These facts magnify the sacrifice and the trust in Jesus.

Five loaves plus two fish equals seven. Seven is the perfect number. God is the highest good.

“Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them...” The Greek is *eucharistesen kai edoken* which is literally translated *He rendered thanks and gave*. These words appear in the earliest Eucharistic liturgies of the Church.

As in all the miraculous feeding accounts we are told that everyone was filled or satisfied. All had more than enough to eat and in each of the accounts there are leftovers. There are either 7 baskets or 12 baskets of fragments in each of the accounts. Seven is the perfect number and number twelve represents completeness. God is all that we need. Nothing else is perfect or necessary.

Jesus instructs His disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." Gather is *synegagon* in the original Greek and fragments is *klasmata*. The *Didache* (9:4), *1 Clement* (34:7), and Ignatius (*Letter to Polycarp* 4:2) use the verb *synagein* to speak of the gathering of the faithful for Eucharist, and *ta klasmata* is the term used for the Eucharistic fragments. (*Didache* 9:3, 4).²

The left-over fragments are an important and significant part of the story. On a pragmatic note, the lad who gave all that he and his family had to Jesus that day would have under current cultural norms had the first dibs on those leftovers. On a deeper Spiritual note, the overabundance of God's grace not only satisfies the deepest hunger and longing in our souls but there is always an unlimited supply. It is a supply that must be shared. Without preservatives there was no way to hold on to those fragments.

Shortly after the second miraculous feeding story in Mark's Gospel, *The Feeding of the Four Thousand*, the disciples are in a boat with Jesus, and they have no bread. Jesus asks them to recount the feeding miracles stories and He asks them about the leftovers, and He asks, "Do you not yet understand?" Jesus was talking about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod and they thought that He was talking about bread. Jesus was talking about Spiritual leaven. The Herod and the Pharisees were fostering a negative and dark Spirit. As Christians we are called to be the leaven of society. We are called to gather the fragmented people into Christ and to become a channel or conduit of God's love and mercy for our world. The baskets of leftovers are still going around the world. The abundance of God's love has no bounds or limit. Do you still not understand?

2. Sacra Pagina Series; The Gospel of John; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 198.

Reflection

This weekend we begin reading from the famous *Bread of Life Discourse* which comprises the 6th Chapter of John's Gospel. The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist the *Source and Summit of our Faith*. My faith and my appreciation for this wonderful gift continue to grow each day. I am starting to see all sacred scripture and in fact all of life through the lens of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is truly the source of my faith, and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the summit of my faith each day.

At its deepest level the Eucharist is about our God of love who desires to share His life with us and our desire to share in His life and in His Love. God's desire for us and the deepest longing of the human heart come together in this great event that we call the Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion. The Eucharist is food for the soul and food for our journey through this life. Psalm 78 refers to the Manna in the desert which foreshadows the Eucharist as "the Bread of Angels." In this gift the promise of Jesus at the Ascension is fulfilled, "I will be with you always until the end of time."

The miracle of the *Feeding of the Multitude* begins the bread of life discourse. It begins by Jesus going up the mountain. This is deeply symbolic of our connection with God. Moses went up the mountain to meet God. Jesus went up the mountain to experience the Transfiguration, the sky opened, and the voice of God was heard.

In today's Gospel a vast crowd followed Jesus. They followed Him for a reason, there must have been a deep hunger and longing in their souls. Jesus has them sit on the green grass and He feeds them. The green grass seems to echo the 23rd Psalm. "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He restores my soul." Jesus is feeding the starving souls that came to Him.

There was a young boy there that was carrying 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. The disciples ask the question, "What good are these for so many?" Barley was the food of the very poor. The little boy probably had all the food that his family had to eat for a week. He gives all that he has to Jesus. Jesus takes the meager and insignificant gifts, and he multiplies them and feeds a crowd of over five thousand men, so with women and children probably twenty to twenty-five thousand people! We are told that all are fulfilled or satisfied, and the miracle goes on, there are twelve baskets of leftovers.

I always wondered about the leftovers. If Jesus is God, and able to perform this amazing miracle, why did he not get it right the first time? Why the leftovers? In fact, in each of the six accounts of feeding miracles in the Gospels there are always leftovers. There are either seven or twelve baskets of leftovers each time. Seven is the perfect number. It can't get any better. Twelve is the complete or universal number. You do not need anymore or anything else. So, there is nothing better and nothing to be added to this sublime gift of God Himself. God is what we need, and we are what God desires, passionate love. We ask God to fill us as we pray, Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Jesus the Bread of Life,



Personal Witness

In one of my parish assignments I was blessed with a particularly Spirit filled and energetic middle school youth group. One of their many activities on the calendar was an annual volunteer weekend serving the community meal at St. Benedict Parish in the inner city of Milwaukee. The youth were assigned to various work details throughout the day and evening including setup, food preparation, serving, bussing tables and clean up. It was a long day and the students learned everything involved serving a crowd of over 500 people. Invariably their interaction with the patrons was most memorable and impressionable for them. One evening, for example, as we were in the church after a long day, I noticed that they were all barefoot. They had decided to give their shoes to the children who came without shoes or with worn and tattered shoes.

The week after we returned from one of these mission trips the youth decided that they wanted to do something more to help the poor, to make a difference. As it were, the parish had a representative from the *Food for the Poor* organization scheduled to come to the parish the following month. After some prayer and discernment, they decided that they wanted to do a fundraiser to raise money for this organization. They were excited to learn that they could choose to direct how the funds would be spent. Their goal was to raise \$2,000 to finance a well project in Haiti.

The plan that they chose was to put on a dinner theater. One of the parents was the high school drama teacher so she was drawn into the project. The dinner plans were to serve prime rib and the play that they chose was a comedy version of Cinderella. The youth worked hard almost every evening planning and practicing their parts for over a month.

When the publicity began, I was shocked by the resistance and negativity in the community, primarily from adults. How could I set up these kids for such a colossal failure? The timing was bad; there was another large community event the same evening. I was told that it was not something that the community would support. We have enough poverty in our own town, why should we send money to Haiti? I don't recall ever feeling so much resistance for a church event in my years as a pastor. The students were feeling the resistance as well and they could sense my growing consternation. Most alarming was the fact that we were ten days away from the event and we had only sold a handful of tickets.

The youth asked that I meet with them in church one night after play practice. They gathered around the altar before the tabernacle, and all fell to their knees. One of them said, "father, will you lead us in prayer we need God's help really bad!" Together we prayed and put everything in God's hands. I recall being terrified that we would fail. Lord, forgive me for my lack of faith.

The evening came the hall was beautifully decorated, the tables were eloquently set, the food was meticulously prepared, and the stage was set for act one. The students created a contribution box and prepared a bulletin board promoting their proposed well project. The students that were serving tables stood positioned in matching uniforms, greeting and seating people.

Personal Witness (Continued)

The room was rather optimistically set for 240 people, which was the maximum allowed. People started to fill the hall, buying tickets at the door. Someone came to me and asked if they could add a couple of tables because the room was filling. I said, "sure, but don't tell the fire marshal." (the statute of limitations has passed). They kept adding tables and chairs and additional people were standing against the wall. As the play was starting one of the parents ran to the local grocery store to purchase some additional food. The play was amazing, the kids brought the house down. The food was spectacular, and the entire evening was delightful.

At the end of the evening people were mingling and congratulating the youth. A parishioner approached me and asked if I knew how much the food cost that evening. I told him approximately \$2,000. He came back moments later with a check for \$2,500. With other donations and ticket sales that energetic Spirit filled altruistic group of 12- to 14-year-old youth raised \$9,000 for *Food for the Poor*.

The following week the entire youth group met with the priest from *Food for the Poor*, and they chose how to allocate the funds. They were able to finance 3 community well projects and to provide food for several thousand people for a full year. The priest told me, with tearful eyes, that it was the largest single donation that the organization had ever received from a youth group.

"Lord, there is a small lad here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for so many?" The boy gave all that he had to Jesus, and you know the rest of the story! I believe in miracles.

