

HOMILY

The 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Every time I hear the story of the feeding of the five thousand, I am reminded (of reading) of a man packing a shipment of food for the poor people of Appalachia. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meat. Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the pupils had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of the paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "Christy – Room 104." She had given up her lunch for some hungry person. Christy sounds like a neat little girl. I suspect that young lad who offered the five loaves and two fish was a pretty neat youngster too, willing to give up his meal as he did.

There is much to talk about in the text; the story is the only miracle to be recorded in all four gospels. So not only did the writers think it tremendously important, but it must really have happened. There are any number of sermons here. What I would like to focus on today is the menu, and precisely how little there was. Five loaves and two fish, not enough, not enough for hungry people.

Listen again to the disciples: *"This is a deserted place and it is already late, dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."* Jesus said, they can stay, you feed them. The disciples replied, But Lord we have nothing but five loaves and two fish and that is not enough for anything.

Lord, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. Lord, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish, that is the response of the ages when people feel overwhelmed by the world around them. It is the response of the parent worried about his or her child. The child has so many peers who exert so much pressure and is with those peers at school and at play far more than he is with the parent. So many influences, so many temptations to face, parents hungry for answers ask, "What are we to do?"

We have nothing but five loaves and two fish; it is the response of the small business owner in the face of a changing economy. How can he compete with the big box store that has opened, one that advertises, "Twenty thousand items under one roof?" He is hungry for answers about how he can keep the little family owned store opened. After all, he doesn't have 20,000 anything.

He has nothing here but five loaves and two fish, it is the response of the employee whose boss makes life miserable and never has a good word for anyone. In fact, there are things going on around the office that just ought not to be. “Business Ethics” has become an oxymoron. Should you blow the whistle? Feel free...if you don’t want your job anymore. Does the word *downsize* strike a similar note? What then? Good jobs are scarce out there. The bills keep coming in and the kids have college to be paid for. A worker hungry for the chance to do right says “nothing but five loaves and two fish.”

It is the response of the spouse trying to make a go of a troubled marriage and grows weary of being the only partner working at the relationship. He is still around some, but not enough, and when he is there, his mind is somewhere else. Hungry for a kindling of the passion, she is left with saying sadly, “There is nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”

Certainly that was the response of the disciples when five thousand men plus women and children followed Jesus into the deserted place, “Five thousand plus.” They had come to listen to Jesus’ words, to feel his healing touch, to be near something, someone special. Now the story says the hour had grown late. It was time for supper and they were hungry. Jesus simply said to them “There is no need for them to go away, give them some food yourselves.”

Jesus always seems to be asking more of us than we have to give, as spouses and parents and students and workers and on and on. He calls us to love, even when loving is difficult. To forgive even when we have been wronged, to stand fast and firm on our principles, even when it means standing alone. Those things are things that are not easy to do. After all, we are not Jesus, our powers are not unlimited, as his were. We have nothing but five loaves and two fish.

Fortunately for the twelve and for us, the story does not end with Jesus asking the seemingly impossible of the disciples, then wandering off into the desert leaving them stranded. Jesus said softly, “Bring them here to me.” He looked up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples who in turn gave them to the crowds. All ate and all were filled, and there were twelve baskets leftover.

There is good news for you moms and dads who find yourselves wondering, “Do I have what it takes to handle these kids today, not to be a good parent, but just one that is adequate.” In the face of overwhelming odds, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. But we have a friend who whispers, “Bring them to me.” Bring them to me, your skills and your weaknesses, your strengths and your fears, your children and their futures. Bring them to me and I will make you adequate for the task at hand. That is good news for spouses in troubled marriages faced with tough decisions, and for students who always feel as though they are swimming up stream,

and for people of conscience who feel called to take a risky stance on some issue. Jesus says to all; “Bring them to me” - your hopes, your dreams, and your convictions. “Bring them to me” - your burdens, your challenges, and your responsibilities. For he who took a paltry lunch bag from a little boy and fed the multitude near Bethsaida can do it again with the meager resources in our lunch bags.

When life gets the best of us, perhaps it is often because we focus too much on how little we can do and too little on how much Jesus can do. When life seems too big and it all feels so small, someone is close who can do what we cannot. There is someone who can right the wrongs and heal the hurts and love the unlovable, someone who can take my paltry little handful of loaves and fish and turn it into a feast. However little I may possess in terms of talents or resources, Jesus whispers, “Bring them to me,” and with him my little becomes a lot!