

HOMILY

The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time *July 25/26, 2009*

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Have you ever felt absolutely overwhelmed? Have you felt like walking away from your desk and just screaming about your work responsibilities? Or your financial responsibilities? Or your family responsibilities?

It has been estimated that 90 per cent of all doctor visits can be attributed directly or indirectly to stress—to the feeling of being overwhelmed. When you think about the stress that many of us are carrying due to the economy, that alone can be a little troubling.

What do you do when you are feeling overwhelmed? Let me suggest some simple steps taken from today's gospel. It is one of my favorites. It's told in all four of the gospels.

Where do we begin? First of all, sit down! I can see Philip frantically running around. "What shall we do? What shall we do?" Jesus knew that panic never solved any problem. "*Have the people sit down.*"

A lecturer on stress management raised a glass of water and asked the audience, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Various answers were called out. Then he replied, "The weight doesn't really matter. What matters is how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

And that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. You have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're

refreshed, we can carry on with the burden. So before you return home, put the burden down. Don't carry it home. You can pick it up tomorrow.

That may be one of the greatest things about worship. It's a time when we can sit still and reflect and listen to the voice of God. Jesus knew it was important to settle down the crowd. So that too is where we begin. Sit down. Calm down. Focus on what's immediately before you.

The second thing: Acknowledge that God has a plan. I like the way a church said it: "If your knees are knocking, kneel on them."

When Jesus asked Philip how they were going to feed all these people. He already had in mind what he was going to do. God has a plan. Do you really believe God is unaware of your needs? Do you believe that God has the ability to meet your needs? Then relax! God will provide. There's power and freedom in trusting God, the same God who multiplied the loaves and fishes that day long ago can give you the resources you need to meet your obligations.

Sometimes, we have to go through some painful situations before we discern God's hand in our life. We often can see God's hand in the rear view mirror. But God is always there. God is always available. God's will is for our best good. An anonymous poet reflected on the name that God used when speaking to Moses. Remember the scene? Moses asked God to tell him his name and God replied: "*I am who I am. This you shall say to the children of Israel I AM sent me to you.*"

This unknown poet writes:

My name is I Am.

*If you live in the past, it will be very hard,
For I am not there.*

My name is not I Was.

*And if you live in the future, it will be very hard,
For my name is not I Will Be.*

*But if you live in the present, it is not hard
For my name is I Am.*

The **Great I Am** is with us. Trust! God has a plan.

Finally the third step: Make a beginning! Andrew came forward to say that there was a boy present with five barley loaves and two small fish. It wasn't much, but it was a beginning. That would give them something with which to start.

Where are your fishes and loaves? Even Jesus had to start somewhere! What are the resources that you have today to make your situation better? Take an inventory. Get started with what you have right now. There are many people who suffer paralysis by analysis—who worry so much about a problem that they never really confront it.

Sometimes they can get into the frame of mind: “Well, I'm going to pray about this and when God gives me a sign, then I'll get started doing something about it.” Friends, this message is your sign. Make a beginning.

Worried about losing your job? What are you doing today to prepare yourself for the next one should you lose yours? Who knows, if you get started today researching the possibilities, you might find a better job than the one you have now.

Worried about your finances? Have you gotten around to making that budget that the financial planner recommended? There are many people today who are discovering that they can live better with less. The point is to start tackling whatever task is at hand. Oh, I know this is easier said than done, but great things come from small beginnings. As someone has said, “Winning starts with beginning.”

So to sum up, what do we need to do when we are overwhelmed? Learn from the beautiful story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Sit down! Acknowledge that God has a plan! Make a beginning! Remember, you are not alone. The same God who multiplied the fishes and the loaves is with you. Remind yourself that you are in the presence of the **Great I Am!**

