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Christ Satisfies the Hungry

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Christ Satisfies the Hungry

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Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for July 26, 2009 for Cycle B:

2 Kg 4:42-44; Ps 145; Eph 4:1-6; Jn 6:1-15

CHRIST SATISFIES THE HUNGRY

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Not a week passes without frequent reminders that many parts of the world have multitudes suffering from hunger. Yet every so often we learn of deliberate waste of good food in some country because of over-production! Yes, the issues are complex but human ingenuity, so creative in manifold ways, has yet to grapple realistically with this question. The least we can do is to be grateful for the abundance we receive.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to the children of man!
For he satisfies the one who is thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

(Ps 107:8-9)

The first reading and the Gospel have a common theme: the people are hungry and a prophet comes to their aid. However, in both cases an inadequate gift from someone else forms the basis for the miracle.

Someone cared enough to share, not being inhibited by the fact that he alone could not solve the problem. Either that person was very child-like or he had great faith. Undoubtedly these qualities should imitated today!

St. John describes three Passovers in the course of Jesus' public ministry (2:13; 6:4; 13:1). During this season the Jewish people celebrate their ancestors' liberation from Egyptian slavery, and they recall how God provided for their food and drink through the ministry of Moses in the wilderness. The experience led them to express total dependence on God for their daily bread. Moreover, God promised to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Dt 18:18).

As Jesus prepared to feed the multitude he was well aware that bread in the wilderness would be evocative of the manna in the desert. His act of thanks was undoubtedly the typical Jewish blessing before meals: "Blessed are you, Lord, King of the universe, for you bring forth bread from the earth." Then he showed that the boy's generous offering of five barley loaves and two fish would suffice. Christ's presence is enough to transform the world -- provided he be recognized in faith and every individual manifest the divine love that imbues him or her.

"Gather up the fragments left over so that nothing may be lost" (Jn 6:12). This command of Jesus indicates that he will not tolerate waste of God's gifts. The disciples filled twelve baskets with the bread scraps, showing that there was an abundance of food. The evangelist's love of symbolism makes us ask if there is another level of meaning. Does the number twelve point to the apostles? "Of those you gave me I lost not one" (18:9, see 17:12). In the early Church, the parallel was drawn between the harvesting of grain to make flour (and bread) and the gathering of Christians into the Eucharistic celebration and the Kingdom of God. "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountain tops and, after being harvested, was made one, so let your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom, for yours is the glory and power through Jesus Christ forever" (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles 9:4). The Church teaches that every fragment of Christ's Eucharistic gift must be sought out and treasured. So too, each human person deserves our respect in his or her uniqueness, with gifts that can be incorporated into the unifying process of serving God in the Church. The Letter to the Ephesians celebrates the essential elements of our faith in the unity of God expressed through the dynamic mystery of Father, Lord and Holy Spirit (4:4-6). From this foundation we are called to practice the dimensions of charity that maintain the unity of the Spirit's capacity to draw all humankind into the bond of peace (4:1-3). In subsequent weeks the Church's selection of readings encourages us to reflect on several aspect of the Eucharist.