

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(2 Kings 4:42-44 / John 6:1-15)
26.07.2015

In the gospel passage we read this morning we see how the Lord was once again *moved with compassion* as He looked upon the people who followed Him.

(Jesus' compassion for the crowd was already drawn to our attention last Sunday.)

Jesus could see that the people were hungry. He wanted to give them food to eat.

There is something very comforting about the fact that Jesus was so aware of people's basic human needs.

It reassures us of His consideration for each one of us. It helps us realise that He is aware of the needs that are ours today.

Christ is aware not only of our physical needs, but also of our emotional and spiritual needs.

There is nothing in us that escapes the Lord's attention. Writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul makes this point: *The Lord cares for us and knows our every need.*

What I want to draw to your attention this morning is how the Lord goes about meeting the needs of those whose plight He is aware of.

In both texts read this morning (our first reading from the 2nd Book of Kings and the gospel passage from John 6) we see how the Lord used people on hand to reach out to the needy who were there before them.

It is striking to see how the Lord uses ordinary, poor people to be the channels of His super-abundant grace.

It is underlined for us that those the Lord uses to reach out to the needy are not the great and mighty, the rich and powerful, but the small and lowly, the humble and seemingly insignificant.

To feed His people the Lord uses servants who feel inadequate in themselves to supply the nourishment the hungry long for.

Again and again the Sacred Scriptures underline God's providence; His providential care for those in need. They show us that what is required in any given situation is provided by the generous hand of God.

Significantly, in both stories read this morning, the Lord uses agents who of themselves are not in a position to meet up to the expectations of the needy people they are led to provide for. In the two stories we read this morning, the servants employed by the Lord to accomplish His work have not got the resources that are needed. They have not got enough bread on hand to supply anywhere near what is required, and yet, when they give to the hungry, they not only discover that they have enough to do this; they actually find themselves with food left over.

For the feeding of five thousand men (without counting women and children) Jesus uses what is provided by a young boy who stands there with *five barley loaves and two fish*.

This little amount proves to be more than enough.

When the disciples are told to gather up the pieces left over, each of the twelve finds himself with a full hamper of food to cater for his own need.

The fact that this boy and the disciples are instrumental in the story underlines the Lord's preference to use human mediations to accomplish His work.

The point for us to grasp is the Lord's willingness to use ordinary, poor, inadequate people (people like you and me) to accomplish His work, to minister in His name, to act as intermediaries through whom He reaches out to others and blesses them.

This is a consoling thought.

God allows us to have a part in what He does.

When we dare to consecrate our small and often very poor resources to the accomplishment of the Lord's work, great things happen.

(Our small, poor resources may be our time, our expertise, our talents, our possessions, our energy, or just our good will.)

I draw attention to the fact that the five loaves at Jesus' disposal were barley loaves.

Barley loaves were the cheapest type of bread: the bread of the poor.

It is precisely through the poorest of means, that the Lord works for us the richest of favours.

It is precisely in and through human poverty that He reveals and makes manifest the riches of divine grace.

I find this thought comforting as well.

It says to me that God can and will work miracles through each one of us who are gathered here this morning.

The Lord can and will accomplish signs through us which touch people's lives and lead them to experience God's love and concern for them.

It is by the intermediary of our human compassion, and by our simple willingness to be of some small help, that the immensity of God's great love makes itself felt in today's world.

What is required of us for God's action to happen in today's world is confidence and trust and, along with these, a simple readiness to be of service.

Here we have the qualities that are required of each one of us if we are to become the Lord's instruments in today's world.

If only we go down the road traced out by the servants of whom today's Scriptures passage speak, if only we place ourselves at God's disposal as they did, daring to step out in faith, trusting in the Lord's capacity to provide much through the little we have to bring, then we can see great things happen.

In and through the small contribution we make, the Lord is able to satisfy people's great needs.

When the little we offer is blessed by the Lord it can permit miracles of God's graciousness to be performed.

Again and again we see how our penury is multiplied.

Again and again, we discover that our limited resources, once they are shared out, extend far beyond our own hopes and expectations and far beyond the hopes and expectations of others in our regard.

At one level, not much is required of us to do a lot, but, at another level, much is demanded of us.

We must exercise great faith, have firm confidence and display genuine trust in the Lord.

Underlying our lives, there must be a basic willingness to serve and a basic readiness to be generous enough to share with others what little we have.

We have to consent to God's grace and leave it free to work within us, and, through us, to reach out to others.

May we consent to God's grace today, so that the Lord may work miracles of abundant blessing in today's world through the poor, limited creatures we are.

This morning I am inclined to think of our community gathered here as those five barley loaves spoken of in the gospel. May we be willing to become bread broken, blessed and given by the Lord, for a hungry world.

Amen!