



July 31, 2011 The Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; come without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!"
Isaiah 55: 1

Dear Friends;

A poor elderly woman lived in a small duplex apartment. She was poor but had a deep faith and often prayed aloud. In the adjoining apartment lived the owner of the duplexes. He was a man of no faith, no prayer and no religion. He often would mock the old woman's trust in God.

One day the woman was praying quite loudly, telling God that she had no food in the house. Her godless neighbor heard this and decided to play a trick on the old woman. So he took a loaf of bread placed it outside her front door, rang the bell and ran back to his apartment. There he heard her cries of delight, "thank you Lord, I just knew that you would not fail me." With a devilish grin the man went back to her door and told her, "You silly old woman. God did not answer your prayer. I'm the one who brought that loaf of bread." Undaunted the woman exclaimed, "Praise the Lord! He always helps me in my needs, even if He has to use the devil to answer my prayers."

Today's readings give us a major insight into God. Both in Isaiah and in Matthew's account of the feeding of the large crowd, we are told that God cares for us in our needs. God comes to nourish and give life. The Scriptures affirm that God directs his attention first to those in need. This is what the Church calls "the preferential option for the poor."

That does not mean he does not care about the rest of us. It means that those who first get God's attention are those most in need. As Sr. Elizabeth Johnson so eloquently states,

"Divine predilection for history's last, lowest and least does not mean that God only opts for the poor. God's love is universal, not exclusive. But it does mean that God has a particular care for those who are suffering injustice and seeks to relieve that situation, which also means that in loving the oppressors, God calls them to conversion." –Quest for the Living God

Through the miraculous feeding of the large crowd today Jesus is trying to invite us to a new community that is modeled on the reign of God. He invites us to look with the same compassion with which he saw the multitude. Then he invites us to give them something ourselves. This may mean giving charity and it may mean that we work for justice. Both are important.

The famous German Lutheran Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was executed by the Nazis) described well the actions of charity and justice: If a horse and carriage break loose and careens down a main road running over people, what should we do? Bending over the injured to bind up their wounds is one necessary and noble deed. But to prevent continuing harm, someone has to grab the reins, or jam the wheel spokes and stop the horse. The former is the work of charity: the latter the practice of justice.

So how can we have the understanding and strength to be the compassion, charity and justice of God? How do we know that we should feed the hungry of our world? It is because we have been nourished by the words of Jesus and the Living Bread of Jesus in the Eucharistic Meal.

Normally when we eat the food becomes part of us, but when we eat the Bread that is Jesus we become part of him. Thus gathered in and assimilated into Christ we have the reserve of strength to feed others especially those most in need. "Come receive grain and eat without cost!"

Peace

Fr Ron