

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's reading from Isaiah, God revealed his generosity. Isaiah wrote, "*Thus says the LORD: All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!*" God gives freely.

The multiplication of the loaves and fish is the story of God's fulfillment of his promises in Isaiah. Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish and fed "*five thousand men, not counting women and children*": "*They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full.*" God not only gives freely. He also gives superabundantly.

The Old Testament prophets constantly challenged the Israelites to act toward others as God's acts toward us. The New Testament challenges us to become more like Christ. If God gives freely and superabundantly, we are called to give freely and superabundantly. As Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, "*The gift you have received, give as a gift*" [Mt. 10:8; NAB, 1970].

The miracle of the loaves and fish can be interpreted in a couple of different ways. Many Scripture scholars would argue that it is inconceivable that so many people would have gone into the desert without food or drink. Therefore, the more radical interpretation of the miracle is that many people brought food, and Jesus inspired them to share their food with others. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish by changing the hearts of his listeners. Once the five loaves and two fish were brought forward, others shared their food as well. St. John's Gospel mentions that it was a boy who gave the loaves and fish [6:9]. Jesus' words coupled with the generosity of the boy called forth generosity from others. Generosity begets generosity.

Fr. Libert Vander Kerken makes the point that especially when it comes to love, we do not have what we do not give.¹ St. Paul explains the significance of this most clearly in his Second Letter to the Corinthians. At the time he wrote, the Church in Jerusalem was in dire economic straits. He was encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection for the poor in Jerusalem: "*Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work*" [9:6-8].

My brothers and sisters, our unwillingness or hesitation to be generous is not always a sign of selfishness. We tend to view life according to one of two models, abundance or scarcity. Many times our lack of generosity comes from fear, the fear of scarcity, the fear that there might not be enough for both of us. In his First Letter, St. John wrote, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...*" [4:18; NRSV]. As Christians, we view life according to the model of abundance. If we focus on the abundance of God's gifts to us, we will be generous in giving. A basis for that model can be found in today's second reading: nothing can "*separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,*" i.e., nothing, nothing at all, can separate us from the free and superabundant love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹L. Vander Kerken, S.J., *Loneliness and Love*, (NY: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 115.