

18th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 55:1-3;
Roman 8:35, 37-39;
Matthew 14:13-21
Little Flower - 8/2/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings proclaim three important qualities of God's love for us.

Through Isaiah, God invites those who have no money to come and receive grain and eat. He invites them to come and drink wine and milk without paying and without cost. He then invites them to come to him and listen that they may have life. God loves gratuitously or freely.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul proclaims that nothing can separate us from the love of God. No set of circumstances, no matter how bad, no creature above or below, no person, no power in heaven or on earth "*can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" now or in the future, during our lives or at our death. What this means is that God's love is the one constant in our lives. No matter what we do or do not do, God never loves us any less or any more. God's love is unconditional.

In today's Gospel, Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, and all were satisfied. After everyone ate and were satisfied, there were twelve wicker baskets of fragments left over. According to Fr. René Latourelle, one of the unique characteristics of Christian revelation is that God's love is superabundant.

In summary, God loves us freely, unconditionally, and superabundantly. Therefore, we are called to love others freely, unconditionally, and superabundantly.

Jesus, of course, is the great sign and sacrament of God's love for us. Since he is both divine and human, he actually embodies the presence and love of God in the world. However, because he lived among us at only one point in time and space, he established the Church to be his sacrament in the world. In other words, the community of the Church would be the sign of his presence and love in the world.

Today's Gospel captures the sacramental dimension of the Church. The disciples were overwhelmed by the number of people who had followed Jesus to a deserted place. They knew the people would be hungry and would need to eat. They suggested to Jesus that he send them away to get food. Jesus, however, challenged them to feed the people. Their response was that they only had five loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus, then, multiplied the loaves and fish. However, he gave them to the disciples to distribute. This is significant.

In other words, the interplay between God and us became evident. The disciples could not feed the people alone, but Jesus needed them to distribute the loaves and fish to such a large number of people. This suggests two things.

Although we are completely dependent on God, at the same time, God has chosen to be dependent on us. We are sacraments of Jesus' presence and love in the world. We are his hands and his feet in the world today. If we look at the Gospels, at what Jesus did during his life, we discover what we as community and as individuals are called to do in our lives. We are called to proclaim in word and action the Good News of salvation, the Good News of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. We are called to be healers and reconcilers among people. We are called to be leaders. In other words, as Christians, we are called to make a difference. Above all, we are called to love as God loves—freely, unconditionally, and superabundantly.

My brothers and sisters, the multiplication of the loaves and fish foreshadowed Jesus' gift of himself in the Eucharist. The Gospel uses the language of the Last Supper: "*Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples....*" We live Eucharistic lives when we love as God loves, as Jesus loves—freely, unconditionally, and superabundantly.