

## PASTOR'S WEEKLY MESSAGE FOR THE 17<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B

### “As much as they wanted”

Our first reading and the Gospel both give us a good example of how generous God is with us. In the first reading, we hear God saying, through His prophet Elisha: “They will eat and have some left over.” This is what happened at the time of Elisha, and it happened, too, at the time of Jesus. This is what we read, also, in the Gospel. A large crowd has come to listen to Jesus. He is concerned that those people must be hungry. So, Jesus asks one of His Apostles where they could buy bread. John, who writes that story, tells us: “Jesus only said this to test Philip; He knew exactly what He was going to do.” And, what did He do? Andrew, another one of the Apostles, had said that there was a small boy there who had “five barley loaves and two fish.” But, Andrew added: “What is *that* between so many?” John tells us what Jesus did: “Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; He then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted.”

Did you notice the last words? There is a huge crowd there. We would think that people will be satisfied if each one of them gets a little to eat, enough not to feel weak and dizzy. This is our way of thinking. God's way is different. God's way is the generous way. It is giving—and giving as much as we wish for. On that day, they all ate as much as they wanted, and there were twelve baskets filled with the scraps left over!

Look at God's generosity in nature. When you sow a bag of seed, do you get back a bag of seed? No, you get a field full of nice maize cobs, or millet, or whatever you have planted. You get from the ground so much more than you have put into it. God gives the increase. Look at the fruit trees all around. Think of the mango tree, for example... At the right season, it is filled with those sweet mangoes that we like. It seems that God does not know how to count! Again, we dig a well. From deep down within the ground, the water comes. It keeps coming. A whole village drinks from this water, and there is more and more of it. Again, it seems that God does not know how to measure! In fact, He *counts*, and He *measures* according to His love. And, His love is infinite, which means without end! This is how God gives.

God gives and gives. He always goes beyond our hopes. He always goes above our expectations. He gives more health and more healing. He assists us with more strength and more help. He comes to us with more joy and more happiness. He blesses us with more success and more good fortune. He grants us more peace and more security. All these good things that we hope for...He gives them “as much as is wanted” and more.

Some of you may have doubts. You may remember some of the prayers you made to God in the past. You say to yourself: *I asked Him for that, and He did not give me more of it, in fact, He did not give it to me at all.* This is possible. God does not always give us exactly what we ask Him for... But do you know what He gave you instead? Have you found out another gift—perhaps much greater—He has given you? A gift, more precious than you might not have dared to ask Him for? Think about it...

There is something else we need to remember from today's Gospel. John has told us that Jesus “knew exactly what He was going to do.” Yet, we see Him accepting the five barley loaves and the two fish from the young boy who was there. There is a message here for us. Do you think, if Jesus can feed a large crowd of people with only five loaves, that He could not feed them without those five loaves? He could have made the miracle without asking the young boy for his loaves. He did not really need them, we could say. Yet, He wanted to need them.

It is the same for us in our lives. God wants that we do our share. He wants us to work with Him. At times, we ask God for this and for that... We make prayers like: *God, make me strong and healthy*—but we do not bother about eating good food, drinking clean water—and when we are sick, we are ready to blame God. When we are like this, we are simply refusing to give God the five loaves and the two fish that we have. We want Him to do the miracle, alone. He is ready to work miracles, yes, still today, but with *our* efforts. He wants our efforts in working *with* Him. Our efforts at pleasing Him in the way we live. Our efforts in turning to Him in prayer; asking Him to show us what He wants from us in each situation.

The Hausa people have a proverb that says: “Stand up that I help you.” In other words, *do a little and I will do the rest for you.* This is very much God's way. He is ready to do so much more for us than we know; so much more than we can think of... But, He needs that little something that comes from us. If we give Him our five loaves, we can be sure that we will get as much as we *need*—and more than we can dream of.