

18th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020

SHARING OUR RESOURCES (AT THE HEART OF EUCHARIST)

WITH A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE, DESPITE THE CURRENT SHADOWS!

Mt 14.13-21 Is 55.1-3 Rom 8.35-39 Rhyme Bible – “Lunch to Share” (based on John)

Well, here we are again and welcome to our virtual celebration of Eucharist, as unfortunately the numbers are still high for new infections and mandatory masks are decorating our visages, which decreases my motivation for unnecessary use of razor blades, and we work on ways to stop the spectacles fogging up in the meantime. It has been a lovely winter week, with plenty of sunshine and space to exercise outside. It is heartening to see the vast majority of people observing the masking requirements, and the Maribyrnong pedestrian bridge has reopened to allow the spread of runners walkers and cyclists. There always remain, however, the selfish and stupid, who fail to realize the impositions of lockdown and masking are for the common good of all of us. We also remember those in aged care, where there is heightened anxiety about health and safety, but let's remember, appreciate and pray for those who provide care in the front line, doing their best to protect those who are frail and sick, wherever they are.

And the economic devastation is real, but life the priority.

(As for travel, to think that the 50 year old 747 Jumbo Jet is now a dinosaur, but that the monster A380 is heading the same way after only 13 years or so, and all of those aircraft just sitting there still for an indefinite time is mind-blowing to me, who loves airports and flight in this wonderful world of a global village.)

Another week, another month goes, by with no end in sight, we in Melbourne and Victoria in general frustrated and anxious about when this crisis will end and restrictions will be lifted. Yet, the harsh reality is that things may get worse before they get better, and even tighter restrictions may be needed for the protection and welfare of all. At least our governments, state and federal, whatever the criticisms (nothing is ever perfect and there is always wisdom in hindsight!), have responded rapidly and responsibly, to address this unprecedented situation, with a view to protecting us and trying to ensure ongoing security for all. Yet, there are always going to be gaps and need for changes and improvements.

As time goes on, we can all be worn down, but the challenge, as they say, is to try and ***‘always look on the bright side of life’***, however difficult that may be. Wendy Squires, an Age journalist writes: ***“I am giving positivity a red hot go, despite the odds”***, speaking thus: *“There has been so much regard for others throughout this pandemic, so much concern for the elderly and respect for restrictions demonstrated at every level, that my faith in humanity has been restored when I needed it most... My final resolution: to look up and around more, and not be drawn myopically into a narrow dark tunnel that seemingly has no end; to be reassured there is light.”* Yes, this might be a secular call to hope, but there is a spiritual dimension to it too, appreciating the good people and things around us, adjusting to the current limitations in a positive and hopeful frame of mind.

We are fortunate enough to still have the love and support of each other, along with our essential creature comforts, a roof over our heads, hot water, electricity, gas, a warm bed, vittles or nutrients of food and drink, and the ability to get out there for exercise in the fresh air and sunshine (when it's out, and wearing our masks!!). Then there's time for reading, reflection, jigsaws and piano for me, and of course, our modern means of virtual but real communication with families and friends (as with ***ZOOMing*** in on each other!). And, tough and daunting as it is, our primary and secondary students are adapting to a new way of learning, with dedicated and willing teachers and loving and supportive parents. This is not to deny none of this comes easily (*note double negative!*), but we need to do what we can to adjust.

As for today's Gospel, how often have we heard of the "**5 barley loaves and 2 small fish**", as Neil, an old university friend in chemistry used to remind me, wanting to know when I would be up to the miracle, after I decided on priesthood, way back there in 1977! Once again, it is not just a miracle story of Jesus, but a reflection on Jesus acknowledging the fundamental needs of the crowd gathered to listen to his message. There's no use giving a spiritual lecture if the hearers are hungry and thirsty and tired. They need nourishment and a rest for revitalization, before being receptive to Jesus' message.

It is significant that Jesus doesn't just take over himself, but orders the apostles to get into action, taking what was available and distributing to the gathered masses. Claude Mostowik cites theologian John Dominic Crossan, (*scripture scholar now 86*), speaking of this account as not **just about food and drink**, but **about just food and drink**: "*They are about sharing God's free gifts and not turning them into commodities that benefit the few.*" That seems to me to resoundingly counter neo-liberal theory about so called trickle down economics! (*Read Ross Gittins, economics commentator with a very human Salvo heart, for a coherent critique!*)

Like Claude, over the years, I have become more aware of this story being about sharing and distribution than multiplication. The spirit of generosity of spirit catching on, as individuals saw others sharing what little they may have had, but, in Jesus' presence, inspired to reach out beyond themselves, realizing this was not a '*pie in the sky*' teacher or theorist, but one grounded at the heart of human needs, physical, emotional and spiritual. In anticipation of the Eucharistic celebration, of which we are physically deprived at the moment, for a longer period than we've ever experienced, and where we naturally feel bereft or even a bit lost, Jesus takes, breaks, blesses and gives the instruction to the disciples to share it all out.

Then there is the symbolism of what's called the **klasmata** (*in Greek for fragments*), or the leftovers in the colloquial, where 12 baskets are gathered, symbolizing the broader scene of the people of Israel, with a followup feeding of the masses miracle in Matthew's next chapter, where the implication is that this is prefiguring a universal welcome to, and inclusion for, all. In the early Church communities, the term was used to refer to Eucharist (*in a book titled **Didache***), and the practice was introduced for the bread blessed and broken, to be taken to the sick and the shut-in, who could not be present with the community for the celebration, something which we cannot even do at the present *time* (*except Viaticum as Communion for the dying, and that's a rare thing*). So, this story has many subtle levels for interpretation and application.

Furthermore, I can't not mention the moving obsequies this week for a great and good man, who died this week at 80, African-American US Congressman of 33 years, John Lewis, of Georgia, who was a protégé of Martin Luther King, and the youngest spokesperson at the 1963 March on Washington, who encouraged '**good trouble**' (*in a very positive sense*) and who was a man of very practical faith, as noted by ex-President George W Bush. I conclude with his (*John's not George's!*) quote: "**Yes, I was beaten, bloody and left unconscious. But I never became bitter or hostile, never gave up. I believe that somehow and some way, if it becomes necessary to use our bodies to help redeem the soul of a nation, then we must do it.**" He leaves the world a better place because of his presence and conscientious activism in it, a man of Christian faith in action, leaving a lesson for us all, leaving this world a better place from his presence among us.

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2nd August 2020