

## 18th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

The Readings of the Mass often focus on God's love, but rarely as powerfully as in today's liturgy. The Responsorial Psalm speaks of God's compassion to all his creatures. We declare our faith in God who is close to all who call on him from their heart, and we pray that God will grant the desires of all who live. In the opening prayer we recognise that we are sinners. To enjoy God's love we need forgiveness. We pray that God will restore us to life and keep us safe in his love.

The First Reading recalls the promises made by God to David, and declares that God makes the same promises to all of us. God wants to have a personal covenant of love with you and with me. We are hungry for love and so he invites us to come to him. We may feel that we have nothing to offer. That does not matter. God knows our hunger, and promises that if we come to him and listen he will speak words of love to us and our soul will live. In the Second Reading we think of Jesus. Paul is convinced that nothing will ever be able to tear us away from his love.

All this is beautifully and powerfully expressed in the Gospel. The inspired author gives us a dramatic portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah echoing God's words of welcome as he says: 'Bring them here to me!' The deserted place, the large crowd, and the miraculous feeding, remind the reader of the manna from heaven enjoyed by the Hebrews in their journey through the wilderness (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11). God is still looking after his people and satisfying their hunger, now through the ministry of Jesus.

There are twelve baskets left over, one for each of the apostles, for the church is to continue the miracle that Jesus is performing. This happens here at the Mass. In the Gospel narrative, Matthew tells us that Jesus took the loaves, raised his eyes to heaven and praised God. He then broke the loaves and gave them to his apostles to distribute. These same words are used by Matthew to describe the Last Supper and we will repeat them shortly at the consecration.

For the first time in Matthew's Gospel Jesus invites his disciples to join him in his mission. This is a key factor in interpreting the passage. Our first lesson in being missionaries of God's love is to recognise our own powerlessness. We are to see Jesus as God's answer to the cry of people's hungry and thirsting hearts.

Initially the disciples are sensitive to the people's hunger. They feel something of Jesus' compassion, but their response is to send the people away so that they can buy something for themselves. They seem to have forgotten the lesson of the Book of Deuteronomy: 'Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness ... He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna ... in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord'(Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

Jesus instructs them as today he instructs us: 'There is no need for them to go away; you give them something to eat yourselves'. The apostles do not understand. It is obvious to

them that they do not have the resources to feed the people. That is true but they are overlooking another far more important truth. Jesus asks them to give their resources to him: Bring your loaves and fish here to me! Bring me your bread and wine? Bring me whatever gifts you have? Come to me?

He then turns to God in prayer, his heart moved in praise and thanks, for he knows that he can 'do nothing on his own'(John 5:19). Then he breaks the loaves and gives them to the disciples for them to distribute to the hungry crowd. This is exactly what happens here at communion time. How can a few loaves feed such a great crowd? With our little resources how can we meet the needs of those who ask for our love?

Nothing is impossible to God. Our talents, our hands, our hearts, our love, our acts of service can bring sustenance to a hungry world. It is radically important that we know that we do not, of ourselves, have the resources to do this. But it is equally important to know that we are not alone. Jesus, who was with his disciples, is with us. United to him and caught up in his prayer, we too can praise and thank God; we too can mediate Jesus' love to each other.

Shortly your representatives will be bringing forward your gifts to the altar in response to Jesus' request: 'Bring them here to me'. Your generous gift of money represents your working time which you contribute to the community and to the poor. But we are asked to give more than our time and a share of our possessions. Listen to the Vatican Council: 'Christ's faithful should be instructed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ the mediator they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other so that finally God may be all in all'(SC n. 48). 'All their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit – indeed even the hardships of life if they are patiently borne – all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God'(LG n. 34).

Our bread and wine will be consecrated and become for us the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ. God wants to consecrate everything we bring to him, especially our hearts, our children, our homes, our work, our joys and sorrows, our life. As our gifts are transformed into Jesus, may our souls, too, become holy, so that we can take Jesus to all those hungry people who are longing for him even though they may not realise it. The measure of our capacity to do this is not determined by our resources. It is measured by our longing and our willingness to draw near to God and allow him to embrace us in his love and love through us.