

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS – 17TH SUNDAY YEAR B

First Reading

2 Kings 4:42-44 (JB)

A reading from the second book of the Kings

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing Elisha, the man of God, bread from the first-fruits, twenty barley loaves and fresh grain in the ear. 'Give it to the people to eat,' Elisha said. But his servant replied, 'How can I serve this to a hundred men?' 'Give it to the people to eat' he insisted for the Lord says this, "They will eat and have some over." He served them; they ate and had some over, as the Lord had said.

The word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 144:10-11, 15-18 (JB)

*The hand of the Lord feeds us;
he answers all our needs.*

All your creatures shall thank you, O Lord,
and your friends shall repeat their blessing.
They shall speak of the glory of your reign
and declare your might, O God.

*The hand of the Lord feeds us;
he answers all our needs.*

The eyes of all creatures look to you
and you give them their food in due time.
You open wide your hand,
grant the desires of all who live.

*The hand of the Lord feeds us;
he answers all our needs.*

The Lord is just in all his ways
and loving in all his deeds.
He is close to all who call him,
who call on him from their hearts.

*The hand of the Lord feeds us;
he answers all our needs.*

Second Reading Ephesians 4:1-6 (JB)

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, through all and within all.

The word of the Lord.

Gospel John 6:1-15 (JB)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee - or of Tiberias - and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover.

Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then 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. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted.' So they picked them up, and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given, said, 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTIONS

If God's presence in this world is to be real and effective, human help is needed. This is vividly portrayed in the gospel passage we have just heard. There are some significant aspects to the story.

- Firstly, the loaves and fish needed to feed the multitude are not created out of nothing, but out of what one small boy was prepared to give.
- Secondly, the five loaves (each about the size of small scone) and the two fish (about the size of a sardine) was the boy's food for the entire day. He did not only *share* what he had with others, keeping a portion for himself, he gave *all* that he had.
- Thirdly, it is the small boy's unstinting and unconditional generosity that makes the feeding of the multitude possible.
- Finally, the multitude learn nothing from what happens. Rather than being moved to become "givers" like the boy, they remain "takers", wanting to make Jesus their king on the assumption that he would be their Messiah and would provide for all their needs.

What does this gospel ask of me today? It asks me to strive to be a "giver" rather than a "taker"; it asks me to not count the cost of giving and to be a person who is sensitive to the needs of others, generous in responding, and in this way to become the generous hands and heart of God in this world

The well-known prayer of saint Ignatius of Loyola expresses well this call to be generous.

Lord teach me to be generous
 Teach me to serve you as you deserve
 To give and not count the cost
 To fight and not heed the wounds
 To toil and not seek for rest
 To labour and not ask for reward.
 Save that of knowing that I do your will.
