

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel, after the 5,000 have been fed, Jesus says, "Gather the pieces together that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." Some of us have never truly been hungry, so it can be hard to fully appreciate how wasteful our developed world must appear to those who watch their families die of starvation. People who lived through the Depression or have lived through wars often carry the scars of being hungry. To this day some of them are on guard against waste. Others try to numb the memory of want by overindulging. For most of us in the developed world, especially 13-year-old middle-class kids, hunger has only ever been fleeting, and we are presently eating ourselves into obesity.

Some people would prefer to think of the story of the feeding of the five thousand exclusively in spiritual terms. There is no question that today's Gospel refers to the Eucharist where all are spiritually nourished by Christ our host. It also refers to the eternal banquet where hunger will be no more. But this Gospel asks us to look at our world through the eyes of Christ's kingdom where the mighty will be cast down from their thrones, the poor will be raised up, and the rich who will not share will be sent away.

There is such a thing as healthy guilt. It's where we become aware of what we have done or failed to do to bring about Christ's Kingdom in our world. Given that it is entirely unnecessary for 29,000 people, on average, to die each day because of lack of food and water and the diseases this brings, guilt on our part seems a reasonable response. It becomes a healthy moment in our lives when we decide to change our priorities, and call for similar changes in a nation's priorities which spends more on bombs than starving babies.

I often wonder what God thinks when he hears wealthy nations say that the reason they refuse to share more with the poor is because these poorer nations often have unelected despots who divert their country's wealth into Swiss bank accounts or nuclear and conventional weaponry programs. Even in the face of these complex issues we could find a way to feed the hungry who might, one day, be empowered to take charge of their nations.

May this Eucharist enable us to do on earth what is done in heaven, where the hungry are welcomed and fed, the leftovers are gathered together and nothing is wasted.

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