

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
July 26, 2009

Readings: 2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15

Happy Meal

This last Friday, just two days ago, the national minimum wage was increased to \$7.25/hour. Assuming an eight hour day, that works out to a daily wage of \$58. With this daily wage, two hundred days wages would be equal to \$11,600, or about \$12,000. In our gospel today, St Philip looks out at the huge crowd that had followed Jesus. He says, ***“Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.”*** How many people could you feed with \$12,000? Could you feed 5000 men mentioned in the gospel, plus the women and children that accompanied them? \$12,000 wouldn’t even be enough to buy them all a Happy Meal.

Philip was pretty wise to know that even 200 days’ wages worth of food wouldn’t be enough to satisfy this many people; and of course they didn’t have the equivalent of \$12,000 in his money belt. The disciples lived a life of poverty. We can look back to our gospel from two weeks ago, when Jesus sent the disciples out two-by-two. ***“He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts.”*** Jesus wanted the disciples to put their trust in God to provide their needs. And even if Philip had enough money, there were no stores to purchase food anyway; there were no Krogers or McDonalds down the road. Philip’s statement makes clear the size of the task of feeding the crowd; it would take a *miracle* to feed all these people.

And that, of course, is what Jesus had in mind all along. He did not criticize the people for being foolish and unprepared, He welcomed them. In last week’s gospel, we heard that Jesus’ ***“heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.”*** Today, Jesus would tend His sheep; He would feed His flock. The people who sought out Jesus, who wanted to hear His teachings and instruction, forgot about their physical needs, but Jesus did not abandon them.

And He will not abandon us. Jesus wants us to have faith in Him to take care of all our needs; to be like little children. He wants us to put God first in our lives; to seek out His teachings and instructions; to follow Him where He leads us. He called the apostles and they left their jobs and their families; they didn’t know how they would survive or where they would live, but they trusted Jesus. And today, in a similar way, Jesus calls men to the priesthood, and men and women to religious orders. We need to pray for and encourage vocations. Those that answer the call give us a wonderful example of faith and obedience and service.

But while most of us will not be called to abandon our families or to take a vow of poverty, we all need to reflect on our own priorities. We reflect on what needs and priorities we place ahead of searching out and improving our relationship with Christ. How much do we obsess about physical comforts and material success, and how do these obsessions interfere with knowing Christ better? We can ask ourselves if there has ever been a time in our lives when we have been so enraptured with listening to the word of God, or so wrapped up in conversation with Jesus in the tabernacle, that we forgot about

eating. I don't think there are many who have missed many meals because they have spent too much time in church.

Our society and government try to convince us that they can try to take care of all our needs. We have social security, unemployment, Medicaid and Medicare, food stamps, welfare, and possibly soon we will have universal health care as well. But do all these programs take away our daily anxieties? Do these programs provide us with fulfillment and happiness? No, only God can provide us with true happiness. God will provide us with what we really need to find true happiness. He simply asks that we follow Him and His Church like good little sheep.

We need to be willing to follow Jesus over that next mountain in our life even when we don't know what's on the other side. We need to follow Him into the desert where it is uncomfortable and where we do not see a clear source of food and drink, putting our trust in Him to provide for our needs. He will work miracles in your life if you do.

It's not easy to follow Jesus, and it's especially not easy to get started on that journey. We often start by praying to find out where Jesus wants us to go, but our prayer is often hampered because we haven't first agreed to do whatever it is He asks. We want to take the process in two steps. First we want to find out what God wants us to do, and then we want to decide if we are willing to do it. And then we get frustrated because we don't hear God speaking to us. But we need to reverse the process. First we must make a true commitment to do whatever it is God is calling us to do, even before we know what it is, and then the second step will flow naturally. We will hear God speak more clearly when we have already committed to picking up our cross and following Him without conditions. It's a very scary proposal, but if you can do it, God will work miracles in your life. Ultimately, you will be well fed at His table in heaven with food much greater than barley loaves and fishes. It will truly be a Happy Meal.

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