

ABUNDANCE OF LIFE (Lk 9:11-17)

Some of you know that I'm a Cajun from South Louisiana. An' sum peepul may fine dat duh Cajun peepul talk kinduh funnee. Dat's beekuz we kum to duh English langwidg kinduh late in life. So yew mite say dat English iz uh sekund langwidg. Me an' Mary wur bak dair visitin' ovr famulee week before las. An' mah bruttuh wuz tellin me uhbowt hiz visit wit Thibodeauz, who iz uh sails manuhger for uh car dealership. Russ said dat Thibodeaux tole him: "Boudreaux iz so furgetfull dat it's uh wunduh he kin sell enyting. I axed him tuh pik up sum po-boys (dat's lak Kajun sanwhitches) on hiz way bak frum lunch, but ahm not shore he will eefen remembuh tuh kum bak." Jus' den duh door flew open an' in kame Boudreaux. "Yew'll nevuh gess whut happun!" he shouted. "At lunch I met Robespierre, duh prezedent uv dat big kumpanee dat we haven't receive an order frum in 10 yeer. Well, we got tuh talkin', an' he gave me un arduh wurt 15 milyunn dollar!" "Yew see," Thibodeaux say tuh mah bruttuh, "I tole yew hee'd furkit duh po-boys."¹ Well, sumwun fergot tuh bring duh po-boys tuh tuhday's gatterin wit Jesus. But, no problem, Jesus take kare uv hit.

On this feast day of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we hear about the multiplication of the loaves. We have to go beyond the obvious miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 to see what the connection is to the body and blood of Jesus. It would be only natural to focus on the simple mathematics of how much bread and fish each person was able to eat out of the five loaves and two fish. Math tells us that it doesn't compute: 5,000 people goes into 5 loaves only a tiny fraction and 5,000 goes into 2 fish even less. Yet the math of Jesus has untold plenty left over --- 12 wicker baskets. So there must be more than an earthly, a human understanding, that is required. Rather than asking "how did he do it?" or "why didn't he do it more often to feed all of the poor?" we need to ask "what is the story trying to tell us?"

The default mode which we humans take to a problem is to size up the situation, notice what we **do not** have, and if things seem hopeless (which they certainly did to the apostles), then to throw our hands up and say "it can't be done." However, Jesus takes a different approach. He gathers up what they **do** have, looks up to heaven to the One who provides for His people, and gives thanks for the gifts, grateful for what is given rather than despondent over what is not there --- the old adage about the glass being half-full rather than half-empty. When we look upon things as gifts, they fall under the spiritual law of "freely received, freely given." And when the gifts are given away, they fall under a second spiritual law that says "if you hold onto life, you will lose it, but if you lose life for the sake of the kingdom, you will find it." The ones who receive the life that is given will be filled, and the ones who give their life will have life given back --- 12 baskets full!²

Jesus gathered his life into his hands, gave thanks for that life acknowledging that his life is not his own but for others, and offered it up to the Father. That is the model which we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are to live. We take his body and his blood into us to provide strength and abundance as we give our lives to others. If we were to read the next few lines from the gospel passage, we would hear that the people want to make Jesus king because he has taught them, healed them, and fed them until they were full. But that is **not** what Jesus wants; rather he slips away from them and goes into hiding. Jesus does not want **us** to make him king either; he wants us to **follow** him, doing what he did and feeding others with our own body and blood. It is our calling as disciples of Jesus, as people who call themselves Christians, to teach others about the kingdom of God, to offer them healing from their many problems and diseases, and to feed them by giving to them what God has given to us. Jesus did not want to be trapped by the world's riches and bright lights and fame --- that is not what the kingdom of God is about. The kingdom is about living in peace and forgiveness and love with everyone --- no anger, no hatred, no violence, no war, no greed, no envy, no selfish desires.

Today we gather around the altar in remembrance of the Last Supper when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "This is my body which is given up for you." Jesus also took the cup of wine, blessed it and said to the disciples, "Take and drink. This is the cup of my blood which is shed for you." When we step up to the communion minister and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we say, "Amen." Then we go out from this church building and give **our** body and blood so that others may have life in the kingdom of God. We are called to shed our blood as Jesus did, in total non-violence, forgiving those who would take our blood, in total obedience to God. We may not know what will result from following God's call, but we do so in faith knowing that, like Jesus, it will be for the salvation of souls. We may think like the apostles that we don't have enough to give --- how can 5 loaves and 2 fish feed 5,000? --- but by giving thanks to God for what he has given us, God will make it enough, with more left over than what we started with. That is the result of the spiritual laws of the kingdom of God.

When I started out in life after my high school graduation, I felt like a nobody. I had grown up in a small, farming town in the middle of nowhere, but had been given a strong faith by my parents. After high school, I went to college and was surrounded by students whom I judged as far superior to me because they had come from much larger places and had access to far advanced schooling than I had had. But somehow I made it through, graduating with honors. I then went into the larger world, feeling like a tiny fish in a great, big ocean with huge fish swimming all around me, people with more experience, people with more drive and ambition, people with more knowledge. I felt like a nobody once again but hung onto my faith, all the time beginning to excel in my job. Eventually, I had a good paying job with lots of responsibility, but the pride which I took was more in how well my employees did, in how they developed

and thrived. Pretty soon I found that I was in the "people business" rather than in the technical aspects of the industry. Then, at the height of my career, I was given an offer to retire early; my skills were no longer needed by the company. And quite frankly, I didn't belong there any longer. That was when I found what God was calling me to, serving people by becoming a Permanent Deacon. During my journey through life, I had been enticed by the allurements of the world, broken in two by sinful behavior, but am being restored back to wholeness by the tender loving mercy and forgiveness of God. I had no idea when I started out those many years ago where I would end up, nor do I know today, because God isn't finished with me yet. I do know that as I have given myself over to Him more and more, that my life has gotten better and better, rich in grace, filled with abundant life and great joy and tremendous happiness, and loved beyond all understanding. I could not have asked for more. Following Jesus and feeding on his body and blood is the way.

What we have we give:

"We give the bread of sustenance for someone's starving baby...

We give the bread of understanding for our own child or brother or sister...

We give the bread of deep friendship for our husband or wife or good friend...

We give the bread of companionship for a lonely senior citizen or a grieving widow or parent...

We give the bread of forgiveness for those who have hurt us...

We give the bread of reconciliation for those whom we have hurt."¹

Deacon Mike Richard

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¹ Taken from the homily "Awesome!" provided by Sunday Sermons and SermonWarehouse, Harmony House Publishing, LLC.

² **The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers**, John Shea, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.