18th SUNDAY YEAR A

FEEDING THE HUNGRY- MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES- SHARING OUR FOOD AND GIFTS WITH OTHERS

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-3; Romans 8:35.37-39; Matthew 14:13-21
Theme: Feeding the Hungry

Fr Leonardo Boff, OFM had two beautiful stories in his book Introduction to Liberation Theology on curbing world hunger and our call to rise to the occasion of feeding the hungry: He recounted an encounter which took place after he had finished mass in a Latin American suburb: A woman in her 40s but who looked 60s walked up to him and said, Father, I went to communion without going to confession first: So, Leonardo Boff asked her why. Then she began her stories- I have been walking to this Church from my village since the past three days. When I arrived, it was already offertory time. When you began handing out those tiny pieces of bread (referring to the Eucharist); I came because I was hungry. Fr Boff was now crying; he recalled the words of Jesus (My flesh is real food Jn 6:55)- How often we take the availability of our daily food for granted. We ought to always thank God that we have food to eat and keep working hard in charity to reduce hunger in the world. We all love food and delicacies; yet eating in excess accounts for so many of the health challenges we live with.

The 2nd story involved Bishop Camara (Brazil) who was walking into the Cathedral premises and noticed a beggar at the gate with 4 kids who were literally fainting of hunger. He walked up to the woman and noticed her little baby girl (about a year) who was struggling with the mother's breast. After the back-and-forth argument between the Bishop and the woman; with the bishop insisting that the woman should give her breast and her reluctance to do so- She lifted her clothes and the poor baby pounced on the breast that was festered with wounds and began to suck violently out of hunger. Bishop Camara knelt down before her and cried bitterly holding their hands and made a vow to fight hunger all through his life.

In our own clime, I was glad to see a news highlight on News 12 on Friday titled FOOD TRUCK FRIDAY. These are positive initiatives. Catholic charities and parish food pantries are doing tremendous good job to reduce hunger in our community. Many thanks to all of you who donate constantly to our parish food pantry and Christina Kelerchian and her wonderful team in the Food pantry ministry. When we share our gifts and food with the hungry, we imitate the superabundant generosity of God. Ps 36:7-10- How excellent is your loving kindness oh Lord. Therefore, the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They feast on the rich food of your house, they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house; they drink from the river of your delight. For with you is the fountain of life and in your light, we see light.

Today's Gospel (Matt 14:13-21) recounts the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes by Jesus. It is very easy to think of Jesus as a magician or superman and hence miss the central message of that Gospel passage. The multiplication of the loaves and fishes is not an act

of a master magician, but a miracle of divine compassion and generosity that manifests God's care for all of us. Jesus invites us to be charitable. To share our resources and money to feed the hungry. By donating more to the Church, charities, etc. When we share our resources; all of us will have enough to eat. Global imbalance is often motivated by human insensitivity and certain narcissistic tendencies in our hearts- (amor habendi habendi crescit)- the love of having grows by having! Think of the food we often waste as trash; the things we keep buying which we do not need.

Among the blessings associated with God's reign in the Old Testament is the end of want and misery, and the availability of food in abundance for God's people (Ps 145:15-The eyes of all creatures look to you Lord and you give them food in due season). Our first reading today is from the Prophet Isaiah (Is 55:1-3). Writing to the impoverished and dispirited Israelites living in exile, the prophet reminds them that God has not deserted them. He will bring an end to their suffering and provide for their needs: 'Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come! Buy corn without money and eat, and, at no cost, wine and milk' (Is 55:1). The prophet Joel doubles down on this promise of Isaiah: 'You will have plenty to eat until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you' (Joel 2:26).

In the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus fulfils the prophecies of Isaiah and Joel. He also manifests, in a very tangible way, the mystery of abundant life symbolized by the parables we heard on recent Sundays: The Lord of the harvest has showered us with an abundance of his gifts, more than we would ever ask for, or need (Eph 3:20-21). It is our hearts that need to be touched and transformed by the extravagance of divine compassion and generosity so that we share what we have received with those in need/the poor/ the hungry, and everyone will have more than enough. The message of the miracle is sharing our food and our gifts with the hungry as the Pastor invited us in the message in the bulletin this week. "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink…for whatever you do to this little sisters and brothers of mine, you did it to me (Matt 25:34-35,40).

Sadly, in our world today, 1 out of every 10 persons (almost 700 million) go to bed hungry, despite the fact that enough food is produced to feed far more than the population of the world. In 2015 many world leaders pledged themselves to end world hunger by 2030 – just four years away and we are far from achieving this admirable goal. Indeed, the chronic crisis of food insecurity in many countries seems to be on the increase because of global warming, wars and conflicts, and a lack of political will to address these issues.

The Holy Father Pope Leo XIV have alerted us to the scandal of this situation. On the 22nd June, he visited the headquarters of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome and laid a wreath at a memorial to the members of this programme who lost their lives attempting to bring food to starving people living in situations of conflict and wars. In his address at that visit, Pope Leo stated that, in today's world, 'conflicts are fed more readily than people are nourished', this reflects 'a fundamental imbalance in our political and moral priorities'. A few facts illustrate the truth of Pope Leo's statement. Global military expenditure is roughly $2.88 trillion a year. The

United Nations estimates that eliminating world hunger by 2030 would cost approximately $93 billion annually, or about 3.4% of the yearly global military budget. At present 30 times more is spent fighting wars than feeding people. This is really scandalous for it questions our compassion with the hungry.

Notice also the circumstance of the miracle of the loaves (Matt 14:10-14)-the beheading of John The Baptist, the sadness it caused Jesus, and his intention to withdraw from the crowd and mourn his cousin John the Baptist. The news of the death of His cousin John the Baptist did not cause Jesus to become indifferent to the hunger of those around Him.

Jesus Christ's intention to withdraw to a secluded place was interrupted by the needs of the people awaiting Him at the shore. He had compassion for them and healed their sick. Despite His sorrowful heart, He healed and fed them in that deserted place. He overcame the weight of His own grief to take upon Himself the weight of the people's needs. Here, we learn the great lesson that we are called to charity even in the most inconvenient circumstances.

At the end of Mass, St Augustine was accustomed to challenge the assembly to enact the meaning of what they had just celebrated by telling them: 'See what you are and become what you see. What you see is the Body of Christ and that is what you must become for others.' So let us pray: Lord, as we receive the Eucharist today may we be your loving and caring presence in our world today. Bread broken for others in our family, this parish, and the world. May we be motivated by a joyful gratitude for what we already have and by a constant concern for the needs and concerns of others. May we attend not only to our own hungers but to the hungers of those in our world who suffer with empty stomachs, aching hearts and lonely spirits, constantly crying out for help. Let us join Flor McCarthy SDB to pray:

The multiplication of the loaves happens in our fields
every year between sowing and harvest time.
Like the miracle of Jesus, this miracle too
is brought about by the power of God. And just as Jesus needed the hands of the apostles
to distribute the bread to the people, so God also needs human hands to make
this abundance available to the hungry. In some countries today the problem is over-eating.
In other countries the problem is getting anything to eat at all.
Today we don't need anyone to multiply the loaves for us. The food is there. What is not always there is the will to share it.

Today is a fitting day to thank God for those who share their gifts in building this parish community: donations at offerings, charities to those in need, Food pantry ministry, society of St Vincent de Paul, Ministry of Hospitality, and indeed all the ministries in the Church be it Faith formation, Ushers, Music Ministry, Adult Faith Formation, Communion to the home bound, Altar Servers, Sacristans, parish council, parish media team, finance committee, parish staff, prayer group leaders, and a lot of unseen ways we all share our gifts with others. Jesus sees all of you. Please hearken to St Paul's advice- brothers, never grow tired of doing what is right (2 Thess. 3:13). Peace be with you. Happy Sunday. Rev Michael Iroh CM