

DA POPULO UT COMEDAT

A Homily for the Seventeenth Sunday of the Year (B)

St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: 2 Kings 4: 42-44; Eph. 4: 1-6; John 6: 1-15

“Give it to the people to eat.” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these words of the Prophet Elisha from the First Reading are words of faith and they are the key to the message that the Lord has for us today. In this short passage we read, among other things, the power of love. A man comes with a sacrificial offering to the prophet as God’s representative. The man of God at once sees the people as God sees them. He sees their needs. He notices that they are hungry. He keeps nothing for himself. He gives out everything. And though little, the food reaches everyone. The little that is provided becomes much in the hands of God.

The action of Elisha, the man of God was great. But it served as a figure of an even greater event. It showed the people then how close God was with them, when they called to him from their hearts. But it was only a pointer to a greater reality when God would become man and feed the people as a good shepherd feeds his flock.

The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us today that he is that Good Shepherd, who is “just in his ways and loving in his deeds”. This fact is confirmed in the Gospel text of today. The people who came to Jesus were hungry for the word of God and enthusiastic to witness the miracles that he performed. The Lord fed them with the bread of the word. But to teach us that he came to save the whole human person, he thought also about their material welfare. He planned ahead of time how the crowds would be fed.

The people were so many. Among the people that time, women and children were not often counted. Only men were. And we all know that in religious gatherings, there are usually more women and children than adult men. So, if there were five thousand men, there must have been more than five thousand women and children. The Lord meant to feed the people. But there was no bread except five loaves and two fish. Andrew made some effort. The owner of the food was willing to share. The Lord gave the increase.

So, here we have an important lesson. There are two parts to this miracle. What we must do and what the Lord does. We must make effort and be ready to share what we have with those who do not have. The Lord blesses our effort and appreciates our generosity. What we provide may be little and our efforts may seem insignificant. But little is much in the hands of Jesus! And every sincere effort is praiseworthy in his sight.

Here in Sweden one hundred crowns may not buy much. But in some places in this same world the value of that money can feed a family of eight for one week.

Furthermore, we often fill our waste bins with excess food. While we do this, millions of our fellow human beings, whom God loves, go to bed without food. Jesus teaches us that we should not waste food that is needed by others. That explains why he instructed the disciples to gather up the left over and twelve baskets were filled. Think of the kind of world we would have if we were sharing what we have with other people. There would be no hungry person!

But a deeper question may be asked. Why are there millions of people who are languishing in unspeakable poverty while others have too much wealth? The Lord challenges us today to ask this question and to sincerely seek an answer. Is it not possible that we who are Catholics can act as the conscience of the world and speak up for justice and more a humane society? In other words, it is our vocation to see people as the Lord sees them.

Let us think always of these two words as the Lord's command: sincere efforts and generosity with what we have. This is what he wants us to be doing. The time to begin is now. The Apostle Paul has better words for what I am saying. Hear him: "***Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience***" (Eph. 4:2). In Christ Jesus, we all, through baptism have become members of one family of love. The Holy Spirit enlightens us to understand our nobility. He teaches us that, "***There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God who is Father of all, through all and within all***" (Eph. 4:5).

*Thank you, Lord Jesus for the grace to know that
little is much in your hands.
and that our feeble efforts have merits in your sight. Amen.*

*Damian O. Eze, MSP
Gävle, 26 July 2009.*