

Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37

At that time:

Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee,
went up on the mountain, and sat down there.
Great crowds came to him,
having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute,
and many others.
They placed them at his feet, and he cured them.
The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking,
the deformed made whole,
the lame walking,
and the blind able to see,
and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus summoned his disciples and said,
"My heart is moved with pity for the crowd,
for they have been with me now for three days
and have nothing to eat.
I do not want to send them away hungry,
for fear they may collapse on the way."
The disciples said to him,
"Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place
to satisfy such a crowd?"
Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"
"Seven," they replied, "and a few fish."
He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground.
Then he took the seven loaves and the fish,
gave thanks, broke the loaves,
and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds.
They all ate and were satisfied.
They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

Homily: Love and Generosity

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "The Lord will never be outdone in generosity." It's one of my favorite sayings about the Lord and I quote it often. When we are generous to the Lord, you can rest assured that He's going to be more than generous to us; it's His love for us first, it's His generosity to us, that inspires a return of love.

We see that played out in spades in our first reading and Gospel today. Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah ch. 25 says, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all people a feast

of rich food and choice wine." In our Gospel today from Matthew ch. 15, Jesus goes up on the mountain, the crowds are there, and they bring to Jesus all these people who are sick and He heals them. The response on the part of the people is amazement. In fact, they are not just there for a few hours, they're traveling with Jesus for three days. It's like they've come to Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House and made a weekend retreat.

Jesus' heart is filled with compassion for them as He realizes their human need; they're hungry. And there's this dilemma...of course we are very familiar with these 4,000 people who are fed with seven loaves and a few fish [having heard this story many times]. In fact, there are seven baskets full in the end. They feast until they're full and then there's plenty left over. There's this clear pairing between the prophecy in Isaiah and the fulfillment of that prophecy where Jesus physically heals them; nourishes their hearts; satisfies their bellies.

A little detail that I call your attention to, is Jesus takes the loaves and He blesses them, and breaks them, but then in turn gives them to the disciples to distribute to the crowds. I think that's the call for each one of us. As we meditate in the midst of this most wonderful time of the year, we have to work not to be caught up in simply the commercialization of the season or our own little rituals that we have for Christmas—and I've got as many of those rituals probably as you—but to not make the season about doing all of these wonderful little things that can sometimes kill the joy. Jesus gives the loaves to His disciples and they in turn distribute them.

Come to the Lord. Spend time with the Lord this Advent season. It's wonderful that we're gathered together here for Eucharist, but we need to enter into deep contemplation even if it's 15 minutes a day, spending some time with the Lord, to allow him to take the loaves to bless them and then give them to us as we in turn distribute them to the people. If we don't spend that time with the Lord in this season, then our gift-giving and our cookie baking and our feasting and our merrymaking and our going from one event to the other will drain us and leave us empty and resentful, waiting for December 26 to just get the whole darn thing over with.

If this season of Advent is about going up the mountain and listening to Jesus in the quiet solitude of our hearts, allowing Him to give us that bread, then we in turn have something to give to others. If not, we're just caught up in the commercialization of the season. The choice is ours.

Amen.

(Amen.)