

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020 A

I am lifting this story from Mother Teresa, but I don't think she'd mind. She told of a family in Calcutta with eight children who had not eaten for several days. She said: ***“I took enough rice for a meal and went to their house. I could see the hungry faces of the children; the sight could not have been more dramatic. The mother took the rice from my hands, divided it in half and went out. When she came back a little later, I asked her, “Where did you go?” She answered, “They also are hungry.” “They” were the people next door, a family with the same number of children to feed and who also did not have any food. This mother had the courage and the love to share her portion of rice with others. In spite of her circumstances, she felt very happy to share with her neighbors what I had taken her.”***

***“They also are hungry.”*** For this woman who knew poverty well, the hunger next door generated compassion and charity – to feel the suffering of another, and do something to help. Aquinas says this is what mercy is – ***to experience the pain and hunger of another as if it were our own, and to do what we can to alleviate them as we would for ourselves.*** Of course, to know that “they also are hungry” does not always lead to compassion. Sometimes, people feel only indifference, to say: “Too bad, but not my problem;” or feel overwhelmed: “It is all so huge and so complex, what can I possibly do?” I often recall Mother Teresa's answer to that, simple but direct: ***“None of us can do everything, but each of us can do something.”*** Perhaps she learned that from women like this one, sharing her rice with her neighbors.

**Took, blessed, broke, gave** – whenever we hear those four verbs, the Gospel writers are pointing us to the Eucharist. Here, Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses: just as Moses gave the Law on Mount Sinai, so Jesus gives the new law of the Kingdom on the Mount of the Beatitudes. As Moses fed God's pilgrim people on their Exodus through the desert, so Jesus feeds the crowd in this deserted place. What Christ foreshadowed with the Multiplication of the loaves, He fulfills at the Last Supper, as we recall in

every Eucharistic prayer – He took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. And then He concludes: Do this in memory of Me.

The “this” we are to do in His memory is not only the ritual of the Mass, but even more, the meaning it enshrines: the self-giving love of Jesus. He TOOK our humanity to Himself, uniting it with His divinity as the Son of God. He BLESSED our human life by His presence, and thus made sacred every stage and every moment of human life. His body was BROKEN for us on the Cross, and GIVEN back in love to His Father, as He says: “Into your hands I commend my spirit.” This is what we are to do in His memory: to take and accept what God places in our lives; to bless it by bringing in into an intentional relationship with God in prayer; to break it by dividing into portions that will nourish another in body and in spirit as stewards of God’s goodness; and then to give it away in love. And when we do this, we find something also of the tail end of this Gospel – that we end up with more than we started with, because love given away always bears abundant fruit for God.

Pope Benedict once said, “*Whoever recognizes the Lord in the tabernacle, recognizes Him in the suffering and the needy.*” In both forms – under the appearance of bread and wine, and under the appearance of suffering, wounded people – it is the same Jesus, veiled and hidden, but visible to the eyes of faith. It is understandably easier to receive the Lord in the Eucharist or to ponder our relationship with Him in quiet prayer than it is to receive Him in what Mother Teresa called “his distressing disguise” in the persons of those in need. But her words and those of Jesus continue to challenge us: “*They also are hungry; whatever you do for the least, you do for Me.*”

This week, we ask: *what has God given Me that I may in turn take, bless, break, and give to those I will encounter this week?* We trust that, when offered in love, whatever we bring becomes more than enough.