

SPIRITUAL LIFE

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Fr. Chris

You've heard the phrase, "There is no free lunch!" In other words, nothing in this life is free. If you think that something is free you haven't figured out where the cost is, but it is there. I suppose in a business sense that may be true. When you receive a gift in the mail or a little extra when you buy something, someone has paid for that. Someone has had to work to produce that. That person received pay for doing their job. So, the company paid for it and the consumer who buys the product will ultimately be paying for the "freebie."

But in another sense everything is free. Consider any product that you buy. If it is natural it is produced in the soil. God provides the sunlight to make things grow. God made the soil rich through millions of years of preparation. No human being put the ores in the rocks. If human hands produce the product it is made in a factory. The coal, oil, and natural gas that we use to power our cars, houses, and factories were produced by millions of years of compression. The plants and animal life that made these natural resources were gifts from God.

We know today that energy is never lost. God placed all the energy that is necessary to make everything work here. All that ever happens is that the energy changes. Molecules and matter change shape and form, but remain constant. So, in a very real way, the Eucharist that we eat today is part of the matter of the bread that fed the crowds on the mountainside in Jesus' day.

Because we live with the illusion that everything has a cost we can't imagine how God can love us unconditionally. We don't know why God would forgive our sins over and over again. We are at a loss as to why the earth is so rich in resources. Certainly we never think that what we have is enough. We can't imagine that we would have enough energy to love another child or the strength to forgive one more time. We don't think it would be possible to reach out to the poor. We don't have enough.

Today's readings remind us first of all, that no matter how much we think we control our destiny we do not. Everything is in the presence of God. Jesus was looking for a place to grieve in silence; to mourn the death of his cousin John. That

wasn't in the cards. The crowds kept coming. It wasn't something Jesus planned or hoped for. It happened.

When Jesus was curing the sick and teaching the crowds it became evident to the disciples that there would never be enough food for them to eat. They realized that there was a need that they didn't create. It just happened. They also knew that they were helpless alone to do anything alone to do anything about it. The second thing we learn today is that God can make enough out of our nothingness.

Jesus took the meager food supplies. A few loaves and fishes certainly aren't enough to feed this huge crowd. The disciples didn't think there would be enough food. They sounded kind of like people today who say, "There are too many people on this planet. There isn't enough food for everyone. We need to cut population otherwise people will starve." The disciples thought the same thing.

Jesus took their small amount of food, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples to give out. There was enough food. There was so much food that all had enough to eat and there were twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus uses the loaves, little though they are, and divides them to provide enough food for everyone. The disciples didn't think they could do anything about the crowds or the lack of food. Christ showed them that they had enough. With His power they could do great things.

Finally today we learn that great things happen only when we are placed at the service of Jesus. The disciples couldn't feed the crowds alone. When they were instructed by Jesus to do so, they had enough food. The food on the hillside was given for all gathered there. It's fascinating that Matthew makes a point of saying there were five thousand men, not counting women and children. In other words, the food was sufficient for those who count in this world and for those who don't. The Kingdom of God is an invitation to everyone. Yet, too many get forgotten or left by the way. Why? Because so many people think they can't do it. They can't reach out to neighbors or co-workers. They don't have the ability to teach children or provide comfort to those who are grieving. We have enough in the power of Christ who is greater than our weakness and provides bounty beyond belief.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 55:1-3

Romans 8:35-39

Matthew 14:13-21

August 3, 2014

靈 修 生 活

體 會 人 類 一 體 的 心

跟據世界宣明會的資料，因為飢餓和長期的營養不良，這世界每五秒便有一位兒童失去生命，可想而知飢餓每天殺害二萬五千名兒童。多年前南亞海嘯帶走近三十萬人的性命，中國大陸華南的水災也造成不少人命傷亡及經濟的損失。但飢餓似乎比這些自然災害給人更大的威脅，飢餓在人類歷史中並非新的問題，人類對飢餓真的束手無策嗎？

本主日的福音似否定今日的答案。不知甚麼原因，耶穌原是獨個兒退避一處，在群眾的需要驅使下，耶穌不忍心繼續隱沒下去而為他們治病。可是，群眾整天在荒野聚集，水和食物是必須解決的問題，一天快將結束，門徒不得不正視這問題，他們到耶穌面前，要求耶穌遣散這些群眾，好讓群眾自行解決飢餓的問題，不過門徒這樣的回應好像是消極的，他們心想只要把問題遷離視線之外，自然地便會迎刃而解，耶穌不同意他們的辦法，耶穌直接明確地要求。

門徒正視飢餓的問題「他們不必去，你們給他們食物吧！」

實在難以想像門徒對耶穌這話的反應，門徒好像被耶穌推到對群眾不得置之不理的處境。幸好似乎除了耶穌和門徒外，有某(些)神秘人深明飢餓的群眾的威脅，瑪竇福音中門徒只說他們之間共有五個餅和兩條魚，完全未有談及這些食物的來源，究竟它們是來自門徒還是群眾呢？似乎在本福音中難以解答，其他的福音對此有不同的記述，可是，可肯定的是某(些)人向團體奉獻原可獨享的食物，由於他(們)的慷慨，他(們)可能也同樣身處飢餓中，不過，耶穌就因著這點慷慨而產生奇跡，使整個團體得益。

今天的福音存著另一種的解釋，有人認為耶穌所作的奇跡非在餅的多寡，祂顯的奇跡是增加人的分享之心，那些原來冷漠的，不願分享的，因著耶穌感動、啟發、刺激和鼓勵，進而拿出自己所有的一切來與大家分享。不過，筆者這樣說絕非抹煞耶穌身上的能力，筆者只想指出個人雖然渺小，但若果願意付出，天主會把其昇華，好讓其他兄弟姊妹獲得飽足，人類不是天主，故然平凡的雙手不能產生偉大的奇跡，不過，奇跡可以是人類和天主的共同產物。

依撒意亞先知所面對的不是飢民，而是口渴的、貧窮的(沒有錢的)人，先知不忘提醒猶太人珍惜勞作的成果，其實這成果不單在於金錢，當中還包括人的餘閒，究竟我們如何善用餘閒呢，除了美食、購物外，我們有沒有提升自己的心靈、自己與他人的關係，這些真的與年齡相關嗎？羅馬人書的內容以另一種方式提醒我們，過去基督徒團體受著迫害、飢餓、赤貧的考驗，這些成為當時信友遠離天主的因素，時移世易，今天增加我們與基督的距離是甚麼呢？是冷漠、自私、妒嫉、驕傲？還是另有其他呢？基督的愛包含我們與弟兄的關係，難怪若望一書也明言：「假使有人說：『我愛天主，但他卻惱恨自己的弟兄，便是撒謊的』」。

香港既是富庶之地，香港人又絕非守財奴，社會上有不少熱心團體常進行募捐，但對於世界廣大的飢民，香港這彈丸之地所能作的卻顯得微不足道，不過飢餓所反映最大的不足不單在物質方面，它同時顯出國民間欠缺彼此的關懷，就讓我們以當下的生活為起點，從我們的近人身上開始建立愛的範圍，努力把愛的範圍在我們的家庭、社會、世界不斷推而擴之。

禱詞：慈悲的天父，祢恩賜我們聖體聖事，使我們得以分享永生的食糧，求祢在生活中時刻指導我們，好讓我們如同祢一樣，樂意與他人分享祢的恩寵。因主耶穌基督之名，求祢俯聽我們的祈禱。亞孟。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 八 月 三 日

依 55:1-3; 羅 8:35-39; 瑪 14:13-21