

The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - God Can Work Wonders from Our Poor Efforts

July 28, 2024

In the senior apartment we are now living in Edmonton, there is a bulletin board by our front door facing the hallway for management to post monthly newspaper and other important notices. There's enough space for the residents to put any decoration they like to show their hobbies, their talents, their cultural and ethnic identity, special occasions such as Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and things or words that touch their heart and their lives. We post a Chinese paper cutting craft picture “五餅二魚” (5 loaves 2 fish) to remind us of our God's divine providence. This Sunday's Gospel (John 6:1-15) shows how Jesus use five loaves and two fish from a child to feed a crowd of five thousand men (plus at least as many women and children). It is estimated that the crowd could have been as large as 25,000 people. People had flocked to our Lord from far. (We experienced that when Pope Francis came to Edmonton). This vast gathering reveals to us the hunger that Jesus instilled in the hearts of people, some of them had already heard Jesus speak and had witnessed His miracles. Others were those to whom the Twelve had just preached in the surrounding villages and wanted to know more about our Lord. These followers were probably intelligent and they had packed food for the journey. When they saw the generosity of the young child sharing his food, they must be touched and started sharing theirs as well. When Jesus prayed over the five loaves and two fish, he must have asked the Father to open the hearts of the people to share what they have. For something that seemed impossible even to the apostles, Jesus knew that "For God, everything is possible" (Matthew 19:26). The multiplication of loaves, the only miracle story included by all four Evangelists, clearly carry a strong overtone of Christian Eucharist. The fact that Jesus humbled himself, became obedient to the point of death - even death on the cross and now living in the Holy Eucharist at every mass in all corners of the world shows us how God can use humility to achieve greatness to advance the coming of his Kingdom.

Remember the Sidney Poitier film “Lilies of the Field”? It tells the story of an itinerant Homer Smith, a labourer who is a jack-of-all-trades and happens to stop at a farm in the Arizona desert to obtain some water for his car. He encounters a group of East German nuns, who believe God sent Homer to help them build a new chapel. The Mother Superior persuades him to do a small roofing repair. Instead of paying him and letting him continue on his way, the nuns invite him to stay for dinner, where all speak German. He teaches them some English. The long story short, the nuns provide him room and board while he does odd jobs repairing this and that for the nuns and teaching them English as well. Being interested in architecture when he was young, Homer finally decides to design and build a chapel out from his little money working for a local contractor. As word spreads about the endeavour, locals begin to show up to contribute materials and to help in construction, Smith becomes a building foreman and contractor of the chapel to be built. Getting enough materials for the building, Smith brings the chapel to completion, placing the cross on the spire himself and signing his work where only he and God will know. On the evening before the Sunday when the chapel is to be dedicated, Mother Superior says “Thank you” in English and requires Smith to help them build a school for the kids. Smith does not say yes or no. That evening, as he leads the nuns in singing his favourite Baptist hymn "Amen" once again, Smith slips out the door and, still singing the lead, the nuns' voices chiming softly behind him, takes one last look at the chapel he built and drives quietly off into the night. A sequel *Christmas Lilies of the Field* was made in which Homer Smith (now played by [Billy Dee Williams](#)), returns and is "persuaded" to build a kindergarten for a group of orphans and runaways whom the sisters have taken in. (Both films are free with Tubi app: <https://link.tubi.tv/rCQuM41KrLb>, and <https://link.tubi.tv/drxrjf5KrLb>.)

The humble work of Homer is like the humble offering of the little boy's possession of five loaves and two fish, his sacrifice by giving all he has to share with others is well rewarded when he sees Jesus feed the multitude. Through the power and prayer of the Lord, the impossible becomes possible. What is given to Jesus as a sacrifice is given back by him totally transformed. The crowd is fed, symbolizing that Jesus has come to give life to all people. Trust in God, joyful humility, and a firm determination to try and do our part are all we need to follow God's call. God will not dismiss our efforts, however little and He will produce his greatest miracles. A great example for us is none other than our blessed Mother Mary, without any hesitation when she was told by the angel Gabriel that she will bear God's son, she said “Yes”, not knowing or despite the hardships that she will face. St. Therese of Lisieux says “I am weak and imperfect. I always feel, however, the same confidence of becoming a

great saint because I don't count on my merits, since I have none, but I trust in him who is Virtue and Holiness. God alone, content with my weak efforts, will raise me to Himself and make me a saint, clothing me in His infinite merits." If we put our poor, weak selves into Christ's hands, he will work wonders in us and through us, just as he worked wonders with those little loaves and two fish. St Bridget of Sweden says that our Lord Jesus humbled himself to become a human being and that for us in the world Jesus willed to consecrate his venerable Body out of material bread and lovingly bestow it on us as food for the salvation of our souls. Today, Jesus will renew his commitment to each one of us, and he will renew his call in our hearts. When he does, let's renew our yes to him, let's give him all our loaves and fish. Every day we live in this world is a miracle of God's divine providence, much greater than the feeding of the multitude, we have to pay attention to the little miracles that remind us of God's presence in our life. We have to thank God not only for our food but for the many blessings and benefits that come our way and which we take so much for granted. We have to put our trust in the Lord every single moment of our life knowing that He can work wonders from our poor efforts, whether to become a priest, a religious, a pope or a saint.