

Homily 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eckhart Tolle in his classic 'The Power of the Now' tells the story of a frail beggar who daily used to sit in an old heavy wooden box in the street, begging for alms. A man stopped and said to him, 'What have you got in that old box that you have been sitting on all these years?' The beggar replied, 'I don't know I've never looked inside.' He then proceeded to remove the nails from the box lid and lo and behold a treasure chest of golden coins was uncovered. Perhaps, this modern parable describes many of us as we routinely fail to realise the great treasure offered to us by God in the gratuitous gift of faith in his son, Christ Jesus.

In today's First Reading the prophet Isaiah emphasises exactly this, the taken for granted treasure we have in the covenant relationship with God and its transforming power. 'Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread. Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant.' This covenant relationship with our faithful, loving and creative God is often the hidden treasure we fail to recognise in our lives.

The Responsorial Psalm offers us insight as to why our faith and covenant relationship with God is such a rich treasure. In explanation the Psalmist proclaims, 'The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. How good is the Lord to all, compassionate to all his creatures. The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his deeds. The Lord is close to all who call him, who call on him in truth.' In short even when we fail God continues to love us and, through his son, has already ransomed us from all of our sins and death itself. All we are required to do is 'call on him' for mercy and forgiveness. What a treasure that is!

St Paul, in The Second Reading today, clarifies the depth of this faithful love of The Father, in Jesus, for each of us, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In summary God's love for us is so deep that nothing can take it from us.

Today's Gospel from St Matthew is a Eucharistic narrative. It describes how Jesus takes great pity on the crowds who had followed him to a desolate place. Despite the disciples urging Jesus to send them away, he instead reproves them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' The disciples replied, 'We have only five loaves here and two fish.' Jesus said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked UP to heaven and said a BLESSING. Then he BROKE the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.'

Very importantly here Jesus uses similar words to those used at The Last Supper: he looked UP to heaven and BLESSED the bread, BROKE it and GAVE it to them. Clearly the Feeding of the Five Thousand is a 'type' (a foretaste) of The Eucharist. In the Eucharist (Mass) we RELIVE the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus in time and space using sacred signs and symbols. The feeding the multitude was a sign of that greater treasure in store for us when Christ would suffer, die and rise again to save us from sin and death.

We must try to avoid the same mistake as the poor beggar who never realised the great treasure inside the old box which he routinely sat on in the street. The Eucharist is that treasure we might just take for granted or make a weekly routine, failing to realise its depth of meaning; how much our Father in heaven loves us, made manifest in the gruesome passion and the deeply humiliating and painful death of his son. Even that ignominious death was overcome by Jesus in his resurrection 'on the third day, the first day of the week.'

How stunningly rich are we?