

## Bishop's Reflection – 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday

I remember the first time I was given greater responsibilities as a priest. Though I never shied away from the confidence that was placed in me, I do remember experiencing a brief moment of hesitation in the five loaves and two fish that were mine to give.

Since then I have had to rely a lot more on God, as people do when they first move out or buy a home, as a couple does when they get married, as parents do when they have a child, or anyone does when they begin a new venture. Over time, we get better at it, but there are still moments when we hesitate and wonder, "All of this, with five loaves and two fish."

"Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." From all appearances, this seems to be the best way to deal with the problem. After all, there is no point taking on more than you can chew. No point, that is, unless God may have it otherwise.

It takes me back to the retreat I was asked to take before I was ordained Bishop. The Retreat Master asked me to read a series of talks based on Moses' life, focusing on trust. Can you trust God enough to stretch your leader's staff across the waters and expect him to do the rest? Can you trust God enough to give him your five loaves and two fish to feed the hungry crowds? Drawing from our Biblical past, as well as from our own lives, we see how God makes up the difference, even taking on the lion share.

Notice how Jesus never asked his Apostles anything more than what they could do. Beginning with the provision of the five loaves and two fish, then getting the crowds to sit in manageable groups of fifty, distributing what was in the baskets and collecting what was left over: none of these activities were beyond their abilities. Some times we make the mistake of thinking that God expects the impossible, rather than focus on what is possible and leave the impossible to God.

The same is still true today. Look at the many millions who are in desperate need to know the truth that we have come to know in Christ. Do we really believe that Christ can make a real difference, not only in our lives, but in the lives of countless others?

And even if we thought it was of paramount importance, look at the extent of the work and the lack of resources. With an aging population and dwindling numbers of priests, with less money and greater costs, with little mood for change and a lack of true energy, is it any wonder we would rather make excuses than listen to the Lord.

Rather than discouragement over so large a mission and so few resources, let us turn to the Lord and the manageable steps he would like us to take. Beginning with ourselves and extending into our family, let us welcome him once again. Some spiritual reading at bedtime, a Bible story with the kids: no more than five loaves and two fish, but enough fuel for God's light to be lit. A mealtime prayer at supper, a weekly reflection on the Sunday Gospel: it's amazing how little it takes on our part and how great God's share. Don't forget Sunday Mass and a simple outreach to the sick, the elderly or the poor: God will take your simple gift and multiply it a hundredfold.

"Send the crowds away," the Apostles said to the Lord. "So that they can fend for themselves." "Feed them yourself, and trust in me." This is Christ's invitation to them and to us today.