

The Best Things in Life Are Free

The Scripture readings for this Sunday clearly show the love of God for His people. In the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 55: 1-3), God, through the words of the Prophet, invites the Jewish people to a banquet of rich food and drink. And He tells the Israelites that the banquet is free of charge.

God asks the people why they struggle and work so hard for things that will not satisfy them while He is prepared to care for them for free. He reminds them that He has an everlasting covenant relationship with them. The question must have been confusing to the people who had been conquered and exiled from their homeland to Babylon for many years. They were poor and struggled on a daily basis to feed themselves and their families.

Of course, God was not telling the Israelites to stop working to feed themselves. He was simply reminding them of the heavenly banquet that had been promised to them and that was waiting for them if they remained faithful to the covenant. 'You will be my people and I will be your God.'

In the Gospel, Jesus continues to fulfill the covenant by feeding the multitude of His followers (Matt. 14: 13-21). While in the passage from Isaiah God issued an invitation to the Jewish people, Jesus actually provided food for five thousand men (probably twenty or thirty thousand people when women and children were counted) and He did this for free. Instead of sending the people away to the nearby towns to buy food, He took five loaves of bread and two fish and proceeded to feed the crowd.

There are many messages in this Gospel but we would do well to reflect on a couple of them. Jesus went in a boat to a deserted place but the people chased after Him. They thirsted for teaching but the Gospel says that Jesus had compassion for them and cured the sick. Instead of compassion leading to teaching, Jesus' compassion led to healing. He healed the sick and then He provided food for the crowd. He cured their hunger. Jesus demonstrated the compassion and the love of God.

And Jesus fed the multitude starting with only five loaves and two fish. The disciples feared that it would be impossible to feed the crowd with such meagre provisions. They were paralyzed by doubts and fears and could do nothing to feed the people. How often are we fearful that what little we have in terms of resources or talent will not be enough to make a difference in the world? Jesus shows that, if we bring what we have to Him, He will use those things to help us accomplish great things. He shows us that, in any situation, we do not need to fear that our limited ability will be insufficient to make a difference.

God made a covenant with the Jewish people and with us who believe in Him that He will care for us. Out of God's infinite love, He has promised to provide everything we need. St. Paul said that nothing will separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8: 35, 37-39). Let us resolve to be faithful to His covenant. Let us banish all of the doubts and fears that hold us captive and trust in Jesus. Let us allow God to love us and to use our talents and abilities, as limited as they may be, to spread His love throughout the world and to continue building up the Kingdom of Heaven.