

## 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

There are several parallels between today's Gospel and the first reading from the Old Testament. I'm sure that St. John had to remember the similar story from the life of the prophet Elisha when he was writing down the story of how Jesus blessed the loaves and fishes and then there was enough for everyone.

One of the points that St. John makes is that Jesus is greater than Elisha. Where in Elisha's day 100 people are fed with 20 barley loaves, Jesus feeds a multitude with five barley loaves and two fish!

One of the parallels from the two stories that we might overlook has to do with the food that Jesus and Elisha started out with. Where did it come from?

In the story about Elisha it was a gift that had been given to him because he was a man of God. But he doesn't keep any of it for himself. He tells the messenger to "Give it to the people to eat."

In the gospel story Andrew reports that there is a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. And Jesus takes the loaves and fish, gives thanks, and gives it to the people to eat.

In this case, too, nothing was held back. Jesus didn't say, "Leave one of the loaves with the boy and bring me the rest." Elisha didn't say, "Give me one of the loaves and give the rest to the people."

There's something about the gift being total that seems to be an essential part of the miracle. Holding nothing back allows for the miracle to take place.

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That goes against the grain, doesn't it. I don't know about you, but I tend to calculate and count the cost of things, especially how much it's going to cost me! Too often I give from the surplus that I have and not really from my "necessities."

I'm working on that because I know that when I do that, I rob God of the chance to be the one who takes care of me. That awareness comes from having no one less than St. Francis and an example to follow. He knew to give God a chance to make good on his promises.

The very thing that we don't see Jesus or Elisha doing is leaving something for themselves and giving the rest away because they trust that God will not leave them in the lurch.

There are some occasions when we do show that sort of generosity. I'm sure you've had the experience of one of your kids bringing a friend over, just when dinner is being prepared. And they ask if their friend can stay for dinner. Even if you have already figured out how much food to prepare, you make room for one more, right? And everyone shares. And no one complains. And it feels right and good to do so, and there's a blessing in it.

The challenge is to make that more of how we do things in general; to live more from the conviction that when we share what we have, we will be blessed for it and someone, our lives will actually be richer than they would have been otherwise.

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As much as we might wonder about the miracle of the loaves and fishes, what Jesus is really trying to get across in today's story is a way of living that is not his alone, but which he provides as an example to us.

And it starts with not holding back, not calculating what we will keep and what we will give away but being willing to let God supply our lack.

The little boy in today's Gospel saw the five loaves and two fish returned to him as twelve baskets full of leftover fragments. Jesus had taken everything he had to offer and the return was more than he could even begin to carry.

Our lives can be enriched in the same way, but it starts with being willing to give of what we have so that God can work his miracle of blessing and turn it into so much more.