

Ordinary 17B 2018
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"What would Jesus do?" I heard about a little boy who got into a heated argument with his sister about who was going to get the last brownie, and his mother overheard this discussion and came in to try to resolve the fuss. Her two children, both extremely upset, each wanted that last brownie. So, sensing the opportunity to teach a deeper spiritual truth, the mother looked at her children and asked that very relevant question..."What would Jesus do?" Well, that little boy immediately answered, "That's easy. Jesus would just break that brownie and make 5,000 more!"

The traditional teaching of the Church is that Jesus literally multiplied the bread and fish to feed his hungry listeners. At the beginning of this century in his classic book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer suggested that what we have here is a "sacrament" rather than a full meal. All the people received was the merest crumb of food, and yet, somehow, with Jesus present among them, it was enough. That, however, does not explain the baskets full of leftovers from the five loaves and two fish. A few Bible scholars even suggest that the "miracle" may be interpreted also as Jesus' success in getting a group of selfish people to share their personal provisions with others. According to this interpretation, it appears strange and unnatural that the crowd had made this nine-mile long expedition to such a desolate village without taking anything to eat.

When people set out on a journey, they usually took their food with them in a small basket called a *kophinah* or in a bigger wicker basket. But if they had done so in this case, each one might have been unwilling to share what he had brought with others. If such were the case, Jesus might have deliberately accepted the five loaves and fish from the little boy in order to set a good example for the crowd. Moved by this example of generosity, the crowd might have done the same: thus, there could have been enough for all.

This view was propounded by the famous preacher-novelist Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe*. This rather fanciful explanation may still be considered a "miracle": it might show that how the example of the boy responding to Jesus "miraculously" turned a crowd of selfish men and women into a fellowship of generous sharers. It does, however, militate against the

Divinity of Jesus, True God and True Man. For it is the literal interpretation of the miracle which makes the miracle a Messianic sign with Eucharistic reference, points to the Divinity of Christ and offers an example of God's love for us, expressed in superabundant generosity.

The miracle itself becomes a symbol of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity. The sharing of the broken bread is a sign of a community that is expected to share and provide in abundance for the needs of its members. Our word Eucharist is taken from the Greek language and describes an action: "to give thanks." In the Eucharist we are fed by Jesus himself, and we are sent to serve others.

The Gospel story teaches that Jesus meets the most basic human need, hunger, with generosity and compassion. Today's readings also tell us that God really cares about His people and that there is enough and more than enough for everybody. Studies show that the world today produces enough food grains to provide every human being on the planet with 3,600 calories a day, not including other foods.

I wish I could be a brother like that:" Paul had received a special pre-Christmas gift from his rich brother. It was a beautiful new car - fully loaded and ready to go. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street kid was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. "Is this your car, mister?" the kid asked. When he replied that it was and that his brother had given it to him for Christmas, the boy said, "You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn't cost you anything? Free? For nothing?"

Gosh, I wish..." The boy hesitated, and Paul knew what he was about to say. He had heard it many times over the past few days. He was going to wish he had a brother like that.

But what the boy said shocked Paul. "*I wish*", the boy said, "*I wish I could be a brother like that.*"

We can be a brother like that or a sister like that. All it takes is that we offer ourselves and what we have, to God. All it takes is that we cease to worry about how little we have and begin instead to think about what it is that we can offer to others, as the little boy in today's Gospel story did by

sharing his bread and fish with the multitude through Jesus. ("Chicken Soup" series).