

Homily for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

A Sacrifice of Blessing, Breaking and Sharing

Some time ago, a friend, a priest, I'll call him Jack,
was working in Latin America.
He'd gone into the city for a meeting and stopped to have lunch,
taking a seat at an outdoor table in front of a restaurant.
When his lunch had been served, a young boy, a street urchin,
let's call him Pedro, walked back and forth by Jack's table,
his eyes clearly on my friend's lunch plate.
Jack called him over and asked him if he was hungry.
You can guess what his answer was!
So Jack took his napkin, put half his lunch in it
and gave it to Pedro.

Jack was feeling good about what he'd done
and watched the boy cross the street to the other side.
There, on the curb, Pedro sat down with three other children,
his brother and two sisters,
and shared with them the treasure of some fresh food,
truly a feast for them, gathered up in a napkin.

Sometimes when you take something small and,
with gratitude, break and share it,
you feed 5,000 hungry families on a hillside.

And sometimes when you take something small and,
with gratitude, divide and share it,
you feed four children, hungry and huddled on a curb.

Jesus had so much left over,
he filled 12 baskets.
When my friend Jack saw what was still left on his plate,
half a lunch,
he put it in another napkin and brought it across the street
to give to Pedro and his siblings.

When the scriptures speak of blessing, breaking and sharing
(as they do in today's gospel)
the imagery is always Eucharistic,
drawing us to Calvary and to the Table where,
in the Lord's Supper every week,
we share in his sacrifice, offered once on the Cross.

To sacrifice is to make something ordinary holy
-- by offering it to God.

We offer simple bread and wine, to God, with thanks and praise
and when we join our offering to Christ's offering on the Cross,
our gifts become holy, become one with his --
indeed, our gifts become him.

For my friend Jack to surrender something as ordinary as his lunch,
to sacrifice what he was to eat, to offer it to God's chosen, the poor,
made of that lunch something holy.
His lunch didn't become the Eucharist,
but it became a holy gift, a blessing:
in his offering it and his breaking it in half to share with others.

What have you and I to offer? to sacrifice to God? to make holy?
What have you and I to give up for others?
What have you and I to hand over, not only from our surplus,
but also from what sustains us?

Do we understand that if the hungry and thirsty in today's first scripture
are to eat and drink freely, as the Lord promised them,
do we understand that the Lord waits for us
to generously share with them from our sustenance
and from what we have in abundance?

In thinking about this scripture and Jack's story,
I've been asking myself these same questions.
What have I to give up? to sacrifice?
to share? to make holy?

And my thoughts have turned to all the times I eat out in restaurants.
But there are no little Pedro's walking by my table in Concord.
So, as someone who lives in the first world,
what I'm called to do? how am I called to share?
how might I share my lunch, my dinner
with all the Pedro's who live so far away?

I had the idea that I might do a little tithing.
That each time I go out to eat, I could make sure
that I contribute the equivalent of 10% of my bill
to the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation.

Well, most of the time when I eat out
the bill goes on my own credit card, not the parish card,
and 10% began to seem like a lot to me
until I remembered that on a regular basis I give 20% of the bill,
2 times a tithe, to the person who brings my dinner to my table.

I've not come to a decision on this yet but I know I need to.
I know that these scriptures call me, call all of us,
to take from what we have and, with gratitude, to sacrifice,
to share it with others
whose needs and hungers are so much greater than our own.

It's with a certain boldness, then, isn't it,
that we are about to approach the Lord's Table
where he will feed us not with leftovers, not with 10% of his love
but with everything he has to give us, his whole life,
his very Body and Blood in the sacrament of the altar.

Such is the gift the Lord returns to us
when we offer our simple gifts of bread and wine,
ask for the Spirit's blessing upon them,
and break and pour them out
that many might be fed and be one in him.

As he did for us on the Cross, as he does for us at this table,
so let us do for Pedro and for his brothers and sisters.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*