

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jul 31st 2011

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

‘Give them something to eat yourselves,’ said Jesus to his disciples. That challenge comes down to us today with the horrendous news of the famine in the horn of Africa in our papers and on our televisions. Horrendous, yet struggling to get our attention through all the other terrible events which seem to grab even bigger headlines.

Today’s readings tell of God’s generosity, even lavishness, to his children. Isaiah quotes the Lord saying, ‘Listen, listen to me and you will have good things to eat’. St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome proclaims, ‘nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we lack food’. In the Gospel today Christ wanted to be alone with the disciples after they had learnt of the death of John the Baptist but the crowds heard that they were going and followed them. After the day spent with Jesus healing the sick the disciples wanted to send the people away to find food but Jesus invited the disciples to provide food for them themselves. All they could find was five loaves and two fish. Jesus, through the Eucharistic action, was able to turn this meagre amount into enough food for 5,000 men plus women and children. And when everybody had had enough they ended up with more than they started with. Impossible.

It has been calculated that a third of the food we buy each week gets thrown away. We hear of farmers in the developed world being paid to not grow certain crops so as not to produce food ‘mountains’ or to depress the price by producing too much. In some developing countries it is now more profitable to grow crops to produce bio-fuels than to provide food for their own people. The potential is there but it needs a concerted effort not just by individuals but more especially by governments to ensure that everybody is fed. And that ‘everybody’ is not just our neighbour next door but also our neighbour in the next country and in the next continent.

The Lord’s invitation, ‘come to the water all you who are thirsty’ does really mean all. It is in our hands to make this world a better place not just for ourselves but for everybody. We have to follow the example of Jesus and his disciples and raise our own awareness of what is happening around us and try to find solutions to the world’s problems. The means are available, natural resources, knowledge, technology expertise, etc. to solve the problems affecting humanity at this time. Are we able to take up the challenge of Jesus and give the starving something to eat ourselves?

Fr. Christopher Newman, cmf