

17B

One day in 1950 a middle aged woman walked into the slums of a very large city. She had only two dollars in her purse, no income and no place to stay. She believed that this call to serve the poorest of the poor came from God and He would provide all that was needed. That woman, of course, was St Theresa of Calcutta. She had nothing to start off with but the equivalent of the five loaves and two fishes but, just like the little boy in the story, she made them freely available to God. Then the miracle happened. The 'multiplication of the loaves' in her instance has been translated into the founding of scores of schools and leprosy clinics, umpteen homes for the dying and hundreds of thousands co-workers the world over.

In today's Gospel, a small boy was asked to part with his precious loaves and fishes. When he willingly does so, Jesus swings into action and miraculously feeds the crowd. God asks small sacrifices of us too and if we respond with generosity he can reach out through us to many others who hunger for His love. St Theresa said that 'God needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts. What he cherishes is simplicity. Parting with five loaves and two fish seems a rather simple gesture on the outside. When he asks something of us, howsoever small, do we respond with the same willingness and generosity?

We all know that the feeding of the crowd foreshadows the Eucharist. When we share in the Eucharist, God can satisfy firstly our own spiritual hunger and then we can help others to make sense of their lives. Jesus said: 'labour not for the food that perishes but for that which endures to Eternal Life'. Most people in our society are not hungering for ordinary food and drink but there is a great spiritual hunger in many people's lives for a meaning to life, a real sense of belonging, an acceptance of who they are, a longing for pardon and forgiveness – ultimately, a yearning for love without which life is bereft of meaning.

Twelve hampers were collected from the scraps after the people had their fill. I notice that people who generously give of themselves to others always seem to have something left over for the next person. You sometimes hear of parents, for instance, with lots of children of their own who are still willing to take in an orphan or a child who is unwanted.

St Therese of Lisieux has this to say:

'Love gives everything, but we, alas, we give only after reckoning: we hesitate to sacrifice what is advantageous to ourselves. This is not love, for love is blind: it's a wild torrent that leaves nothing behind in the path where it has gone.'

In the passage today Jesus sent no one away hungry - they all ate as much as they wanted. When we come to Him with open hearts, we won't be sent away hungry either.