

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 herself called by God to serve the poorest of the poor and He would provide all that was needed. That woman, of course, was St Theresa of Calcutta. She started off with the equivalent of the five loaves but 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 – which was probably his lunch. 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. When he asks something of us, like the small boy in the story, do we respond with the same willingness and generosity?

We all know that the feeding of the crowd foreshadows the Eucharist. In the Mass God can satisfy firstly our own spiritual hunger and then we can help others to draw inner strength from the Eucharist. Jesus said: 'labour not for the food that perishes but for that which endures to Eternal Life'. Most people in our part of the world are not hungering for ordinary food and drink but there is a great spiritual hunger in many people's lives for a deeper 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. But feeding the physically hungry is one of the corporal works of mercy. On Friday I was down at the hub in Solly Street at a cheese and wine and entertainment evening to help raise money for Mary's meals. The evening brought home to us the looming famines in Africa at present as a result

of war and drought where hunger stalks the land and children go to bed hungry. Jesus said: 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat'.

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 offspring of their own who are still willing to adopt or foster a child in need. 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome'.

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 hands and a pure heart, we won't be sent away hungry either.