

**Little is Much in the Hands of God**  
**Homily for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**July 26, 2015**

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I have something that I'd like to give you to take home with you this week. It's a short phrase that I'm going to ask you to repeat after me and think about, as you'll hear me use it throughout today's homily. That phrase is, "Little is much in the hands of God." Can we all say that together? Great! Keep listening and we'll unpack that over the next few minutes.

As most of you know, I travel almost weekly for business. Although it's not always possible, I occasionally make it to daily mass and get to experience the broad spectrum of worship styles in faith communities across the country. Last week I was in Arizona and I found a mass time that fit into my schedule at Arizona State University's Newman Center. So at mass time there I was in downtown Tempe, AZ.

Before mass began I was praying about this weekend, about what God wanted me to share with you, and I was pretty frustrated by his silence. Suddenly my prayerful quietness was interrupted when everyone stood up. As I looked toward the altar, out came a very tall altar server, an ASU student who was about 6'4". I didn't see the celebrant immediately, but heard what sounded like metal hitting and dragging against the marble floor. And then I saw him. I don't know his name, but he made a dramatic impression on me. You see this priest is physically challenged, and the noise of metal on stone that I had heard was the sound of his crutches supporting him as he walked. In addition to needing crutches, this priest is a little person. As he stood behind the altar, his chin was just barely higher than the altar table, and it was all but impossible to see his shoulders if one was sitting in the pews. And there he was, this beautiful man, leading us in prayer, proclaiming the

gospel, preaching eloquently and offering the sacrifice of the mass for all of us. His image is etched indelibly on my conscience because it was clear to me that he was using all the gifts that God had given him and ignoring the challenges. Little is much in the hands of God.

As I thought about this priest my own limited vision became clear to me. I went to mass expecting to see a fully able-bodied celebrant like today's celebrant. Instead, I saw a man with challenges that he chose, by the grace of God, to overcome or ignore. And I also saw how God is not partial, how God chooses to use each of us as his servants in the world, regardless of any conditions that might be viewed by human eyes as limitations. There is an apt saying here: "God does not call the equipped; He equips the called." Little is much in the hands of God.

As I reflected on my experience in light of today's gospel, I noticed some parallels. Jesus needed some "down time", but the people followed him because they had seen the healing miracles he had done. They didn't understand that Jesus was God in their midst, but they knew he was special. In the gospel they even proclaim, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." They don't say "a prophet", but rather "the prophet". Aren't our reasons for following Jesus very much the same as the people of his time? We see his miracles in the gospel and we see his miracles in our lives; we recognize who he is and we want to be near him. Jesus understood that and was filled with compassion for the people.

His compassion included a recognition of their physical hunger, so he asked Phillip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" Now more parallels begin. Phillip can only see what is directly in front of him so he quantifies the impossibility of the situation: "Two hundred days wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little." Peter's brother Andrew further defines the impossibility telling Jesus, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"

I have no doubt that Andrew and Phillip were good people, eventually becoming martyrs, saintly people. But at this moment, the human reality in front of them hid from their sight any possibility of feeding the crowd. In human terms, feeding the crowd of more than 5,000 people was an impossible dream. Jesus was unencumbered by the limitations of their human thought. I wonder what went through their minds when he said, "Have the people recline." In their natural, understandable, limited human vision they must have wondered what Jesus was about to do.

Jesus began where he always began: by turning to his Father and thanking him for the blessings in front of him. And then he began to hand it give the food to the crowd.

There is no record of the precise way in which the loaves or fish were multiplied. Did each single loaf turn into a second when Jesus handed it to the people? When he took one loaf or fish from the basket, did a second one mystically appear in its place? No one knows. But what the evangelists tell us is that when the feeding was over, they filled twelve wicker baskets with what was left. You see, God provided not just what they needed, but an abundance beyond their wildest expectations. Little is much in the hands of God. And this miracle points to the miracle of the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Eucharist, offering his own body and blood to sustain his church throughout countless generations and lifetimes.

I've heard some commentators speculate that what really happened is that everyone there had secreted away a little food with them and began to share it with one another, thus providing plenty for all. Although no one knows definitively, I think this is a misinterpretation. The details of this story are so important that they are retold in all of the gospels. This is the only one of Jesus miracles to be recorded by all of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

But there is a human element involved in what happens in this miracle. Jesus involves his apostles in the work of feeding the people when he asks them how they can feed the people. This is a sign for them of what will be expected of them and all his disciples, including us, when he has returned to the Father.

What we see in our humanity are challenges, limitations and scarcity. God sees the big picture. Andrew and Phillip saw too many people and too little food; Jesus saw hungry people and the unlimited bounty of the Father. I saw a priest who is a little person; God sees a giant! I saw a man on crutches; God sees a track star! Our quest is to strive to see with the eyes of God and to respond with the heart of Jesus. That's a tall order whether you're 4 foot 6 or 6 foot 4. But remember, whichever one you are, little is much in the hands of God!