

11.20.2022 Sunday Next Before Advent (John 6:5-14)

*“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”* (John 6:9).

When preparing for our service today, I read those words from the Gospel and was reminded of Fr. Tait speaking on All Saints’ Day about the Beatitudes - the *“blessed are”* statements found at the beginning of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. After reading those foundational statements that Jesus chose to place at the beginning of His longest, most-detailed teaching, Fr. Deems asked us to notice the difference between those people which the world would describe as blessed, and those persons, the saints that Jesus described as blessed in the kingdom of heaven.

This world tells us blessed are the rich, the independent and self-reliant, but Jesus said blessed are the poor, the humble saints who have nothing of their own, those who begin every new morning relying entirely on the grace and mercy of God (Lamentations 3:22-23). The world tells us blessed are the powerful, but Jesus said blessed are the meek and merciful, those who are *“slow to anger”* (James 1:19) and quick to *“overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21). The world tells us blessed are the peace keepers, but Jesus said blessed are the peace makers, not people who merely try to keep the peace by placing tolerance above Truth, but instead those saints who model their lives, and share in the work of the Prince of Peace, who made peace by *“speaking the truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15).

The Beatitudes are a gift from God, given directly to His people through our Lord Jesus Christ, and this gracious gift helps us approach the trials and sorrows and difficulties of this earthly life from a heavenly perspective, for it is through these *“blessed are”* promises that those who mourn are assured of God’s comfort, His peace which passes all understanding. It is through these promises that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness know they shall be filled, and the Beatitudes give cause for the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake to rejoice, for it is the King of Heaven, it is God Himself, who definitively declares to the poor and to the persecuted that theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

When we compare our experience in this world to the promises stated in the Beatitudes, we recognize the vast difference between those people which the

world would describe as blessed, and the saints that Jesus described as blessed in the kingdom of heaven, and I would suggest that difference is also evident in our Gospel reading this morning. The feeding of the 5,000 is a familiar story, and as you know, on that evening Jesus saw *“a great multitude of people coming toward Him, and He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’”* (John 6:5-9).

A crowd of thousands had followed Jesus into a remote location, night was falling, they had no food, and the words that Philip and Andrew spoke to our Lord epitomize the way the world views this crowd and their circumstance. Philip pointed out the difficulty of the situation when he said to Jesus, *“Two hundred denarii,”* or two hundred days wages, wouldn’t be enough to provide food for them. Andrew saw a boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish, but naturally concluded, *“what are they among so many?”* These tired, hungry people are far from what the world would describe as blessed, and the only solution the disciples came up with was to *“send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat”* (Mark 6:36), but Jesus refused, because God will never send us away hungry (Matthew 15:32).

The world views this crowd, and anyone who rejects their own physical comfort to follow Jesus, as a fool, but what our Lord so miraculously revealed to that crowd is the truth He proclaims in the promises of the Beatitudes. Blessed are the humble and poor. Blessed are the meek and the merciful. Blessed are those who so hunger and thirst after righteousness that they deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and obediently follow Jesus into the wilderness of this world (Luke 9:23). People who do these things: deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow our Lord are blessed, because it is through faithfully following Jesus that we remain in a position to freely receive the fullness of what His grace intends to give (John 15:5).

From the world’s perspective it was a foolish act, but the crowd followed Jesus on the narrow road. They obediently did what they could, and trusted God to do what they could not. Their part was to faithfully remain with Him.

The boy's part was to obediently offer everything he had, and Jesus took that which to a crowd of thousands appeared to be nothing, He took five loaves, two fish "*and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.'* Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten" (John 6:11-13).

On that day Jesus took what was freely offered to Him, what to a crowd of thousands appeared to be nothing, but in the hands of God quickly and miraculously became more than enough. Jesus not only provided for the people "*as much as they wanted*" (John 6:11), He not only met the need of thousands, our Lord provided for them so generously that when this feast was over they filled "*twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish*" (Mark 6:43). Now, may we be given eyes to see that God is working with us in the same way.

Like the crowd, we are striving to faithfully follow Jesus on the narrow road. Like the boy, our desire is to obediently offer Him our five loaves and two fish. By the grace of God we do what we can, and God does what we cannot. He takes our loaves and fish, which in this world so often appear to be nothing, and multiplies them until they become more than enough. With that truth in mind, let me ask you this: Do you have a little faith? Offer it to Him and through Him your faith will move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Do you have a little hope? Place that hope in Christ and it becomes the "*hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27). Do you have a little peace? Give what peace you have to God, and He will give you His peace, "*which surpasses all understanding*" (Philippians 4:7). Do you have a little love? Offer it to the God who is love (1 John 4:8), and He will multiply your tiny gift in such a miraculous way that crowds of thousands will not only be *filled*, but will overflow with the love of God.

The Beatitudes are promises to the humble and poor, to the meek and merciful, to those who have only five loaves and two small fish, and these Divine promises assure us that those who are seen as foolish and weak and are "*counted as nothing at all*" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28) in the eyes of the world, are blessed saints in the kingdom of heaven.

“All things come of Thee O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee.”  
By the grace of God may we give that which is little to our Lord, because in  
His hands the little is made more than enough.