

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by
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July 28, 2024

Today, I have two questions for you. I'll give you the answer to the first question, but as to the second question, I'll have you think about it and I will individually accept your answers after Mass.

First question:

What do the following locations all have in common?

- Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Kibeho, Rwanda
- Fatima, Portugal, and
- Lourdes, France?

At all four of these locations, **children** were blessed to have experienced visions of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. But why children? Amidst much speculation is the theory that children have a greater innocence and openness than do adults. But really, only God knows.

In today's gospel, we have a child, a boy, "who has five barley loaves and two fish," offering the ingredients—if you would—for one of two miracles of Jesus that are so important to the story of salvation history that they are included in ALL four of the Gospels. Today's miracles of the "loaves and the fish" is one of those miracles.

Second question:

What is the other miracle that is documented by Matthew, Mark, Luke AND John? I'll privately take your answers after Mass.

But, back to today's gospel miracle of the loaves and the fish.

As already noted, a boy provided the offering, a meager five loaves and two fish, that Jesus would miraculously transform into sufficient food to feed the vast multitudes, with twelve wicker baskets of fragments leftover! An unknown boy, whose name was not considered significant enough to be recorded by the evangelist, makes a seemingly insignificant contribution that God multiplies manyfold. I would suspect that there are many times in each of your lives when you've been on the receiving end of a kind act or gift, that you fondly remember. A gift whose intrinsic value may have been small, but whose impact was beyond measure to you.

As for me, there've been a number of times when I've been told by a grateful individual of something that I did for them—which I barely remember, if I remember at all—that made a big difference in their life. Whether it be a consoling word at the loss of a loved one, encouragement in times of trouble or a simple "thank you," actions that are lost in the fog of my memory, have had what I hope is a positive impact on the lives of others.

There are also times when we've all felt that our efforts were inadequate. We try to help our friends and family, but nothing seems to work. We try to fix our family members' lives, but our efforts don't seem to

make a difference. We try to seek forgiveness for our transgressions, but others are still resentful. We try to encourage our friends, but they still seem disconsolate. We try to love, but it doesn't seem enough.

Just like he did in today's gospel with the "five barley loaves and two fish," it's comforting to know that Jesus accepts what we give, blesses it, and multiplies it. Often in ways that we don't see or are not able to see, at least in our lifetime. Who knows what a kind word does? Who knows what a single act of charity will do? God can take any small offering we make—a kind word, a brief visit to the hospital, a quick apology, a short thank you note, a smile—and multiply it!

I would like to close with a prayer that summarizes what I've tried to convey in this homily. I have found inspiration in this prayer whenever I have felt down or whenever I feel that my efforts are insufficient. It gives me great peace. Commonly known as:

The Romero Prayer

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.