

Homily for July 26, 2009 (17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, B)  
2 Kgs 4:42-44; Ps 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18; Eph 4:1-6; John 6:1-15

One of the time-honored institutions in many churches is the potluck meal. For many people it's an opportunity to sample a fellow parishioner's special Jello® salad, barbeque, mac 'n cheese, peach cobbler or pound cake. For others it's a wonderful opportunity for fellowship with good friends and to make some new ones. For still others, it's a break from having to cook!

Potlucks are certainly all of those things. But as you prepare to dig into your next so-heaping-it's-about-to-collapse plateful of food in the church hall, you might also want to consider the potluck as something else: a testament of faith. In the different parishes I've been blessed to serve I can't begin to count the number of times when it seemed that the amount of food people brought was nowhere near being enough for the number people standing in line to eat.

But it always was. In fact, there were always at least some leftovers. As a sign of God's judgment and mercy, of course, I was even compelled to bring some of those leftovers home! 😊

Today's Scripture readings might be called "The Potluck Primer—The Book of the Three B's." Those three elements are the **bread**, the **bringing**, and the **building**.

Both our first reading and gospel featured miracles of multiplied bread. We use the word "miracle" to describe things that defy scientific or rational explanation. When confronted with scarcity, it's natural for us as human beings to want to hold onto or even hoard what we have. It's part of our instinct for survival. On the other hand it's supernatural, a miracle if you will, for us to place our faith in God and to share with others despite what seems to be too little in our own hands.

Of course, any miracle is entirely God's doing. But sometimes we fail to see miracles or to seize the opportunity to reveal them. Miracles, like other manifestations of God's grace, are more often than not worked through the people he has created. So how can we help bring those miracles forth in our world?

*Start with the bread*, that is, what we have in hand. In our first reading, Elisha was presented with barley loaves, the roughest and simplest kind of food. However, it's also important to note that these were the "first fruits" of the harvest. It was customary to present these to the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving but also an acknowledgment that God is the source of all life and blessings.

In our gospel reading, the disciples—faced with Jesus’ concern for the hungry crowds—initially focused on the problem at hand rather than the solution at hand. There was no way, they thought, that they could feed so many! They didn’t have enough money and they didn’t have enough food.

We can often be like the disciples. Despite what seems to be a little rally on Wall Street lately, life for a lot of people these days is pretty tough. Many families have lost their homes. Some are visiting food pantries for the first time ever. States throughout the country are facing huge budget deficits and have had to make cuts in services precisely at the time when there is greater demand for them. Churches, too, are feeling the pinch as collections have dipped and granting agencies have less to give. Some have had to lay off ministers or cut back on programs.

But Jesus, echoing the example of Elisha, asked Andrew, Philip, and the other disciples to cast their eyes not on what they didn’t have or what they needed but first on *what they had been given...and bring it to the Lord*. He then gave thanks and shared what they had. This should sound very familiar. After all, this is what we do every time we celebrate the Eucharist! This is one of those areas of our lives as Catholics that the Mass is both a celebration of who we are and a rehearsal for how we are to live outside the walls of the church, on the other six days of the week.

The next time you find yourself in the pew during the Preparation of the Gifts (“Offertory”) consider what’s in *your* hands. So often we focus on the size or frequency of our monetary offering; but that’s just part of the equation. Whatever you have in your hands, think of it as your “first fruits” and something for which you can give thanks to the Lord.

If you don’t have a lot of money to give these days, then consider a greater gift of time and talent. If you don’t have a lot of time, then consider a higher monetary gift and maximizing the gift of your talents when available. If you think you don’t have a lot of talent, then spend the time developing one and give what you can.

Nourished with the bread of life, *we are called to build community*. In our second reading Paul notes the signs, the work and the reality of a healthy faith community. The signs are humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance through love. The effort consists of preserving “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The reality, after all, is that we are one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, “one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all.”

Bread...Bringing...Building. They’re all part of a fourth “B”—*Believing* what we proclaimed in our Responsorial Psalm: “The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.” +