

HOMILY for 18th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about feeding the hungry; that reminds me of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.'" One of them turned to the other & said, "You be Jesus!"

Anyway, it's difficult for us to share something with others. For we humans like to hand on to things & keep them to ourselves. It is that human tendency that Jesus wants to challenge & change in this Sunday's Gospel for the sake of a loving & caring community. Let's take a look at the Gospel & see what Jesus wants to teach us.

I'm sure you've heard of this Sunday's Gospel before. Apparently there was a big crowd of several thousand people who followed Jesus for quite some time. They were hungry & tired after a long journey. Jesus turned to His disciples & asked them to take care of these poor people. Here's what happened, "...The crowds heard [about Jesus] & followed Him on foot from the towns. When Jesus disembarked [from the boat] & saw the vast throng, his heart was moved with pity, & he cured their sick... Jesus said [to His disciples]: 'There's no need for [the crowd] to disperse. Give them something to eat yourself.'" As you can see, Jesus showed great concerns for the hungry & tired crowd. He did not ignore the basic needs of the public like some typical leaders. As the leader of God's people, Jesus wanted to take care of their basic needs. He didn't just talk about God's love & then let them go hungry or thirsty. I think it's very important for us to take note of that. Many religious & political leaders might talk about God's love & make promises to the public. But they don't want to do anything concrete to help the hungry & the poor. Like the early disciples, they want the public to fend for themselves. Jesus clearly did not choose that easy way out, but told His disciples, "...Give them something to eat yourself." I'm sure Jesus would say the same thing to us, especially our religious & political leaders. That's one of the big differences between our Lord & a typical leader. He doesn't just talk the talk; He walks the walk.

The early disciples apparently wanted to avoid the responsibility of caring for the public needs by dispersing the crowd & letting them fend for themselves. But, Jesus intervened & demanded them to accept that responsibility if they wanted to follow in His footsteps & live His way of life. He didn't want them simply talk about loving their neighbors & then do nothing about it. Unfortunately, we live in a time that people talk about loving their neighbors & then do nothing for the poor & the hungry. We see Christians & some politicians call the public to defend the unborn lives, but they would do nothing about the lives that have already existed in front of them, namely, the lives of the poor & the hungry. How can we believe that those Christians & politicians would protect the lives are still forming when they cut funding to provide food & basic needs for the lives of the poor & the hungry that already existed? That's why Paul challenged his Christian community back then & said, "How can you claim to love God while showing no care & concerns for your neighbors? You can't truly love something untouchable like God unless you've learned to love what exists before you, namely, your neighbors. After all, your neighbors have been made in the image of God." Our current Pope follows the same thought of Paul & calls on all Christians to be the defender of all lives by

protecting not only the lives of the unborn but also the poor, the hungry, & the criminals who are on death row. He wants us to truly be the defender of the unborn by showing our love for the poor & the criminals, or the lives that are already here on earth. Sadly, some Christians have attacked the Pope & accused him of not being pro-life. So, be careful about those Christians & politicians! For they might claim to be pro-life, but they would tell you “not to wear mask or take all the precautions measures to keep yourself safe” during this pandemic. That’s absolutely crazy!

Many Christians simply pick certain lives like the unborn & ignore the poor & the criminals. Or, they call us to adopt & take good care of the pets/animals while turning a blind eyes on refugees & people who have to suffer under the ravage of war or other misfortunes. As we’re approaching the election, we can see many Christians being duped & misled by politicians & their rhetoric. One particular misleading rhetoric that I want to caution & point out is the claim of “taking care of the poor & the hungry is somehow being considered a Communist/Socialist.” First of all, is it wrong to take of the public needs like caring for the poor & the hungry? If we think it’s somehow wrong to address the public needs, then why do we have public school, public transportation, public parks, social security, & so on? Secondly, have these critics of Communist/Socialist system ever lived in a country that uses that system to govern its people at all? I bet most, if not all of them, NEVER lived in a Communist/Socialist country before. People cannot really critique something when they have NO experience about it! They don’t know what’s good or bad about it. Finally, we need to be careful about associating the work of taking care of the public needs with being Communist/Socialist. For in this Sunday’s Gospel Jesus calls us His disciples to take care of the needs of the crowd that happens to be hungry & wants some food. If caring for the public needs is somehow considered to be Communist/Socialist, then Jesus has to be a Communist/Socialist. Of course, we don’t want to label our Lord that way. But, if Jesus is a Communist/Socialist, then God must be one too! For God also takes care of the public needs & shows concerns for all peoples.

My dear brothers & sisters, this Sunday’s Gospel ends with a fully-satisfied crowd & 12 leftover baskets of food. When we’re generous & caring, God will help us take care of the public needs for 5 thousand people, or even 5 billion people for that matter. So, let’s not worry about running out of resources to care for a big crowd, including native-born people & immigrants alike. All we have to do is trust in the Lord & ask Him to look after everyone including the poor, the hungry, the unborn, & the criminals. For the Lord sends us this invitation in today’s First Reading, “...Come to me heedfully; listen that you may have life.”