

August 2, 2020 Homily

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Isaiah 55: 1-3; Psalm 145; Romans 8: 35, 37-39; Mt. 14: 13-21)

On this 2nd day of the brand new month of August, we celebrate this Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Summertime is rapidly flying by, even as this extraordinary circumstance of the worldwide pandemic continues to hold its tight grip of restrictions, social distancing and a variety of hygienic protocols as part of our “new normal”. This is the month when, in other more normal circumstances, we might be trying to fit in all the fun and relaxing summertime activities before the “normal” busy-ness of September arrives. But, in these unusual circumstances, nothing is “normal”. Yet we continue to look for ways to have some much needed “R and R” (rest and relaxation).

The Readings for this Sunday certainly lend themselves to that sense, inviting us to spiritually slow down, “smell the spiritual roses”, and spend time with our Loving God.

In today’s first Reading, Isaiah the Prophet, speaking on God’s behalf, could not be more warm and inviting in extending to us all an offer for spiritual “R and R”. In those 3 short verses, we read the inviting word “*come*” four times. “*come to the water.....come receive grain and eat.....come without paying and cost.....come to Me heedfully and listen that you may have life.*” That word, “come”, is such a warm, inviting, reassuring, loving word. Parents use that word all the time, especially when one of their little children have a need; all a parent needs to say is “come here”---“let me hold you”; “let me kiss your boo-boo”; “let me help you”----and the child knows everything will be better. When someone who loves us invites us to “come”, there’s an element of trust, warmth and confidence. So, when we hear these words today from our Loving God, Who loves us more than anyone else, that should certainly result in us running to God with open arms. As that Reading tells us, with God, there are “no strings attached” and “no cost for admission”. God’s love is free and unconditional.

We heard Jesus say the same thing in today's Gospel passage. Jesus intended to take a few hours of "R and R" for Himself, because He had just learned that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been murdered. Jesus was sad and He wanted to go away by Himself to deal with His grief. But when Jesus got to where He intended to be by Himself, He found a huge crowd. He didn't try to send them away. No, St. Matthew tells us: "*His heart was moved with pity for them*" and He took care of their needs. Later, when the disciples asked Jesus to send the people away because there was no food, and the people needed to go find food for themselves and their families, Jesus said: "*There is no need for them to go away....Bring them here to Me!*"

Jesus was saying to the people: "*Come to Me*". And of course, we know what happened next; Jesus worked a powerful miracle. With only five loaves and two fish, Jesus miraculously multiplied that food to feed the more than 5,000 men, not counting women and children!!!

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus says those same comforting and loving words about us: Don't send them away! Bring them to Me! Just as God said to the People in today's First Reading, Jesus says the same thing to each of us: Come to Me!----"No strings attached"-----"come without paying and without cost"---"come and Listen to Me, and I will fill you with the Food that satisfies your hunger forever! As we heard in the Gospel Reading, Jesus took those 5 loaves and two fish----He looked up to Heaven----He said the blessing----He broke the loaves----He gave them to the disciples and to the crowds!!!

That's exactly what we do at every celebration of Holy Mass. We respond to God's invitation by "coming" here to Him, in person or virtually; we "come" without paying and without cost. We "come heedfully"----we listen carefully to God's Holy Word. And then, the priest does the very same actions that Jesus did: take the bread....bless it....and say: "*This is My Body....this is My Blood*". And we will either be able to actually receive our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in Holy Communion, or do so "spiritually" to be our spiritual Food and Drink!

This is what love really is: the Love of God for His precious sons and daughters----His Family of Faith; the Love that you all share with one another in

your beautiful Families; the Love that we are called to share and spread with those around us----our relatives, coworkers, friends, neighbors, and those we don't know, including those who don't love us in return!

Our world continues to suffer from this never-before experienced pandemic, and on top of that, our country is in a spirit of crisis, with deep divisions among us. We appear to have lost a sense of being able to disagree with one another civilly, and have resorted to violence, personal insults, and attempts to damage or destroy those who hold different opinions. And so, the warm and gentle invitations coming from today's Scripture Readings might "fall on deaf ears" in the midst of our current societal circumstances. However, St. Paul reminds us of something extremely important. Because Jesus has won the victory over sin and death, there is nothing that can separate us from God and God's Love. St. Paul asks a very good question, and we should ask ourselves this question today: "*What will separate us from the love of Christ?*" He goes on to add his list of possibilities: *anguish, distress, persecution, famines, nakedness, peril, the sword.*" What would be on your list? Perhaps you can make a list later today. Perhaps it might include: health concerns for yourself or your loved ones; worries about your financial situation because of this pandemic and loss of business and employment; worry about the future of our country; fears for the future of your children? Whatever is on that list, remember St. Paul's powerful words that he uses as the answer to his own question, and the litany of forces that are no match for Jesus' Victory: "*neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not present things, not future things, not powers, not height, nor depth, nor any other creature----nor any of the things on your own list----will be able to separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

All we have to do is respond to God's unconditional and never-ending invitation: "*Come to Me*"---I will give you comfort, I will show you mercy and compassion----I will give you forgiveness---I will give you the truest "R and R" you could even imagine. I will give you Life here and now, and I will give you Eternal Life with Me in Heaven. All you have to do is: **Come!**

God bless you. Faithfully yours in Christ, + Bishop Paul J. Bradley