

Commentary on the Readings for August 6, 2023

The 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All of the Readings for today talk about compassion. In the context used here, compassion is more than pity or sorrow for someone, both of which are negative. Rather, true compassion is a heart-felt understanding of the situation and perhaps an attempt at appropriate action to alleviate the cause regardless of the circumstances. The readings here are intended to show us how God was and is compassionate beyond comparison and that we are expected to show compassion and understanding when called upon.

In the **First Reading**, from the *Prophet Isaiah (55:1-3)*, we hear God speaking through the Prophet to the people of Israel sometime shortly after the return of the exiles from Babylon. A great famine has developed and the people are hungry, but they do nothing about it. God's words are intended to wake them up and have them call upon the "Holy One of Israel" to help them as He promised He would help King David. This promise went beyond alleviating hunger; it included His never ending watchfulness or guidance, including eternal salvation, if only they would be faithful.

The **Responsorial Psalm (145:8-18)** gives us the psalmist's view of God's benevolence and compassion in poetic form. Although this is a small portion of the psalm, we should listen carefully to the words and their meaning because we can learn a great deal about God from them. You are encouraged to read the entire Psalm from your Bible. You won't be disappointed.

In the **Second Reading**, from *St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:35-39)*, we hear one of Paul's strange statements on spiritual reality. In this day of so-called "reality shows," let us look and listen to Paul's comments about God's divine compassion and faithfulness that have been a reality from the beginning of time and will be so until the end of time. Whenever you are faced with any of life's difficulties, this is the passage that you should turn to.

The **Gospel Reading** is from *Matthew (14:13-21)*. This is the familiar story of Jesus feeding five thousand (or a very large number) of people. Rather than focus on the miracle as most people do, let us look at the compassion that is present in the person of Jesus. People from all over Galilee have brought their sick or handicapped friends or family to be healed by Jesus. He not only heals their physical needs, but also their spiritual needs. Then He has pity on their lack of food and challenges the apostles to give them food to sustain their bodies. Because this would be impossible for any man or woman to do sufficiently, Jesus does it for them. In this act we see a preview of the Eucharist that is to come. If there is ever any doubt in your mind when you receive Him in Holy Communion, remember this story and ask yourself: "If Jesus can feed hundreds or thousands from a few loaves and fish, can He not change bread and wine into His Body and Blood and then feed multitudes today?" The Eucharist is truly food for the soul just as bread is food for the body, but something greater is happening in this scene. It is also a preview of God's eternal love that will sustain all mankind through all eternity. Again compassion is more than feeling sorry for someone. It is being there for them and trying your best to fulfill their needs. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

MFB