

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 125th anniversary of St. Benedict Parish

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

St. Benedict Parish, Baltimore

125th Anniversary

July 29, 2018

When we open our eyes, we see need all around us.

Far too many people are unemployed, homeless or living in substandard housing. Many people wonder how they will pay the bills and get enough food to eat. How many lack decent health care even as they struggle with chronic illnesses, including drug and alcohol addiction?

Many people long for safe neighborhoods and better schools. Young people are looking for opportunities, for a brighter future. And if we look into our own hearts, we also find so many needs - disillusionment, broken dreams, dysfunctional relationships . . . the list goes on.

And you might ask me, "Archbishop, we don't see you very often. Why this litany of woe?"

As we celebrate our anniversary, why not offer us instead a word of encouragement, a word of hope?"

And, that is precisely what the Lord offers all of us this morning, for "the hand of the Lord feeds us, he answers all our needs!" - words we sang together in today's Responsorial Psalm.

Let us not skip over those words lightly - “The hand of the Lord feeds us, he answers *all our needs.*”

“All our needs?” we might now be tempted to ask?

There never seems to be enough money, enough volunteers ... enough compassion. So many remedies, programs, experiments seem to fail. We are left hungering for peace, happiness, friendship, justice, and a decent life. Is it true that the Lord “answers all our needs?”

Doing a Lot with a Little

Today’s Scripture readings nudge us to lay aside our human calculations on the enormity of need versus the scarcity of resources.

Instead, Scripture shows us how God does a lot with only a little.

We see this both in the reading from II Kings and in the Gospel passage from St. John. A crowd of some one hundred people had assembled and they were hungry. A man gave Elisha the prophet twenty loaves of bread. In turn, Elisha said, “Give these twenty loaves to all these people.”

But the man objected, “There’s not enough! So little for so many!” Undeterred, Elisha ordered the bread to be distributed and speaking in the Lord’s name, he prophesied that there would be more than enough to feed everyone . . . and so there was.

In the Gospel, Jesus encountered a much larger crowd, about 5,000 people. They too were hungry - hungry for food and hungry in spirit. And what resources were on hand to feed so many people?

The Apostle Philip tells him, five loaves and two fish” - so little for so many.

Yet, in ways that remind us of the Eucharist, Jesus spoke to the crowd and then had them to recline. Next he took the loaves and the fish, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to the people, more than they could possibly eat - twelve hampers of food were left over.

The Multiplication of God's Gifts

For 125 years, St. Benedict Parish, your parish, has been doing a lot with a little.

With the modest contributions of hundreds of parishioners, led by the Benedictine Society, this beautiful church was constructed in the depths of the Depression.

For years Benedictine priests and brothers ministered in this parish asking little in return. The same is true of the School Sisters of Notre Dame who taught in the parish school. Because of your faith and generosity, coupled with your sense of community, God's gifts were multiplied in this parish and in the wider community.

Over the years, much has changed in our city, in this neighborhood and in this parish; but one thing remains the same: the St. Benedict's "multiplier effect" is still at work.

To understand this, all you have to do is visit this parish before Christmas. There you will see the nearly miraculous multiplication of turkeys, as well as the multiplication of Christmas gifts for those who are in need.

Many of you are involved in this wonderful effort, inspired by Father Paschal; I've seen it myself on a few occasions, and I want to thank you. I thank you because you are not merely multiplying turkeys and Christmas gifts; you are multiplying faith and joy and a sense of dignity and friendship in the neighborhoods you serve and far beyond.

On a shoestring, with few resources, Father Paschal has managed to open and operate a radio station, WVTO, that spreads the Good News far and wide, among believers, non-believers, the disconnected and those who are searching.

Yes, just as we read in today's Scriptures, God's grace and goodness enables us to do a lot with a little, or better, to offer God what little that we have, confident that he will use it to multiply his blessings.

The Source and Summit

But what is the secret of this multiplier effect? What is its hidden source?

It is not magic or sleight of hand but neither is it immediately apparent how your parish and many other church ministries do so much with so little. The answer lies in a mystery, the mystery of the Eucharist in which we offer the Lord a little bread and wine that represent all that we have and all that we are.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, the priest, acting in the person of Christ, takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and distributes it - no longer bread but the true Body and Blood of Christ.

Thus Christ is multiplied in us and among us, so much so that we can say with St. Paul that 'it is no longer we who live but Christ Jesus lives in us.'

This is where we get the strength, the wherewithal to be the Lord's instruments in multiplying his blessings amongst ourselves and amongst our neighbors.

The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is also the glue that holds the Church together. That includes the parish, the archdiocese and the Church universal.

In today's reading from Ephesians, St. Paul urges us to bear with one another, to be patient and loving with one another, to strive to preserve our unity in the Lord and

the bond of our peace.

In the 3rd Eucharistic Prayer, which we will offer in a few moments, we will also ask God the Father to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us, so that we might become “one body, one spirit, in Christ.”

Thus, the Eucharist is the source of our charity and the bond of our unity.

Brought together in Christ we are sent out to share his truth and love with others, thus multiplying the blessings we have received.

As we celebrate the 125th anniversary of St. Benedict Parish, let us give thanks for those who have gone before us in faith. But let us also resolve that, on our watch, we will continue to open our hearts to the Lord, confident that he will multiply his blessings amongst us for years to come!

Through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady and St. Benedict of Nursia, may God bless us and keep us always in his love!