

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Reflection

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

The past five Sunday our New Testament readings have been from Romans Chapter 8. Romans 8 is one of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture. Of all the books and chapters in the Bible, Romans 8 is one of the most significant and hopeful. In this Chapter Paul encourages us in times of struggle to embrace the reality that our present suffering cannot be compared to the glory that awaits us. (Romans 8:18). Eternal vision gives us true perspective. Paul goes on to tell us that when we find it hard to pray or are not sure how or what to pray, “the Spirit intercedes with inexpressible groanings” (Romans 8:26). God prays for us! Moreover, Paul writes, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God” (Romans 8:28). Paul does not say, “all things are good”, but that God can and does work good in all things -this is an important distinction. Today we look at the conclusion of Romans 8 in which Paul assures us that nothing can separate us from the Love of God. Hear again these powerful words (Romans 8:35, 37-39):

What will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?
No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly
through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor present things, nor future things,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Wow! This is such GOOD NEWS! Nothing can separate us from God’s love! Nothing, absolutely nothing can take away God’s love from us. Neither life or death or things present or things to come.

These are not light words. Paul’s conviction came out of his own struggle with life, death and faith. Paul understood from the core of his being the reality of pain, suffering, hardships and disappointment. Yet, he knew and proclaimed, through the power of the Risen Lord that nothing could separate him or us from God’s love in Christ Jesus. Moreover, Paul’s conviction came out of a deep abiding trust that God was FOR HIM! If we can embrace the reality that God is FOR US, we can walk through any valley, even the valley of the shadow of death, and the valley of COVID-19, and know that God is with us and will guide us along the way.

Paul says in Romans 8:31-35, immediately preceding our passage this morning, these life changing words, “If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”

God is FOR US! God is FOR YOU!

COVID-19 and all the challenges and uncertainties associated with it cannot separate us from God’s love. The present realities of the pandemic and the future unknowns of its ongoing havoc in our lives and world cannot separate us from God’s love.

Our Gospel lesson this morning sheds some light on how we are invited to embrace and trust the reality that God is for us.

We are told that when Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist he went away in a boat to a deserted place by himself. Jesus journeyed through the valley of death just as we do. He needed time with God, just as we do.

The crowd tried to follow Jesus on foot. When Jesus got out of the boat he saw the crowd and had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening came the disciples told Jesus to disperse the crowd so that they could go into the city to buy something to eat. Jesus said to them, "There is no need for them to go away; you give them something to eat." But they said to him, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have." Then he said, **'Bring them here to me.'**

Five loaves and two fish were all they had. Not possibly enough (so they thought) to feed over 5,000. How often do we look at what we have and say disparagingly, "This is all I have" or "This is all we have."

The difference was not what they had, but whose hands had it. Five loaves and two fish were just that, five loaves and two fish in the hands of the disciples. But in the hands of Jesus, it was a feast for thousands with plenty left over.

Jesus invites us to bring what we have to him. Bring what we have and all that we have into his gentle hands and loving heart. Bring our fears, our hungers, our sadness, our struggles, our insecurities. Bring all that seems insufficient to the one who is all sufficient.

Remember, the one who turns a meal into a banquet for thousands is the very one who is FOR US. Nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, because he gave all he had, his very life to God on a cross.

What looked like death and defeat in the eyes of the world, was in God's hands the very key to life. Through Jesus' self-donative love and death on a cross God brought forth forgiveness, resurrection and eternal life.

What do we need to bring to Jesus? What offering(s) can we place in His loving hands? What do you need to bring to Jesus?

This I know, God is for us and that makes all the difference!

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve