Father O’Connor’s Homily for 28 July 2024

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

2 Kings 4: 42-44

Ephesians 4: 1-6

John 6: 1-15

 Today, and for the next four Sundays, we read from the Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 6: which is known as “the Bread of Life discourse.”

 A word that I would like to work with today, which is descriptive of the Lord’s gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist, is the word **bounty**.

Two students were having an argument about which internet search engine was the best. One of them said, “I really don’t like that one because every time I use it I get stuff that I don’t really need.” The other replied, “That’s exactly why I like it: because sometimes the stuff that I really need is not the stuff that I am looking for.”

 The deluge of information that comes to us through the internet is clearly huge. But, by comparison, it gives us only a tiny glimpse of our all-knowing God who knows infinitely more. Our God is an awesome God. And our God is **bountiful** with His blessings.

 Bounty. That is a word that you and I say three times a day with our grace before meals, don’t we: “Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy **bounty,**through Christ our Lord. Amen.” Bounty means the **extravagant** blessings of God.

In today’s Gospel we see Jesus blessing the hungry crowd bountifully and extravagantly. Five thousand hungry men are there at that mountain. Jesus knows what He is going to do, but He first tests His apostles. He asks, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” And Philip answers, “Lord, two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.”

Andrew, Simon Peter’s “can-do” brother, says, “Jesus, there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good are these for so many?” Then Jesus says, “Have the people recline.” Then He takes the bread and the fish, blesses them and tells His apostles to distribute them to the crowd. And there is plenty for everyone to have as much as they want. In fact there are twelve baskets full of leftovers! We see the bounty of Jesus. He is extravagant with His blessings!

 Notice that Jesus had the people first sit down on the grass. Why? For the very same reason that you and I are here today: to take the unhurried time “to sit down for a spell” and reflect upon and be grateful for the blessings that we have already received from God – and to get ready for those still to come.

 The people in the Gospel received something that they hadn’t asked for. They came looking for more cures for the sick. But Jesus gave them something else: bread and fish multiplied so that everyone could be filled, and no one would leave hungry. All of this was in view of His gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist – His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity – so that we can be nourished bountifully by Him today, who alone can satisfy our hungry hearts.

 Sometimes the stuff that we really need is not the stuff that we are looking for.

A lady in a small town was going to be evicted from her home. Some of the neighbors put some money together so that she could pay her rent. One of them went to her house to deliver their gift, and knocked and knocked on her door, but there was no answer.

Come to find out, she was inside that house all along. But she was afraid to answer the door because she thought it was the landlord coming to evict her. And all the while, God’s answer to her prayers was right there on her doorstep.

Sometimes the stuff that we really need is not the stuff that we are looking for. But the Lord knows what we truly need. As He has blessed us bountifully in the past, He will continue to bless us bountifully in the future. Our God is an awesome God and our God never changes His stripes.

 Some children were asked to describe what “bountiful” meant to them. “Bountiful is an extra bowl of ice cream, and getting to stay up late, and laughing a lot,” said Alison, age 7. “Bountiful means I have lots of books to read, and lots of warm clothes for the wintertime,” said Emily, age 9. And Brian, age 10, said, “Bountiful means we have everything we need, even though we don’t have everything we want just yet. It makes me feel safe.” I especially like Brian’s response.

 We all need to take some time regularly “to sit down for a spell” somewhere and reflect on the Lord’s blessings – the ones we asked for and the ones that came as a complete surprise. As we sang in today’s Responsorial Psalm: “The hand of the Lord feeds us. He answers all our needs” [Psalm 145].

As we pray our grace before meals at our tables, let us not be in a one-breath hurry with our thanks: “Bless us, Lord …gifts … bounty … Amen. Pass the gravy, please.”

Not like that, but with hearts grateful for the Lord’s bountiful, extravagant, and oftentimes surprising blessings that we have already received. And waiting in joyful hope for those still to come: “Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy **bounty**, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”