

## *Eighteenth Sunday of the Year (A) – From Little to Great by God’s Grace*

In today’s Gospel story we find several expressions of the rich human love of Jesus:

His heart grieves for the death of his cousin, John the Baptist.

He withdraws to find comfort and strength in the sympathetic company of intimate friends.

When the crowds come with all their different needs he attends to them despite his own sorrow and weariness.

In this human love of Jesus the Divine love of God is made manifest.

What happens next in the Gospel story is a demonstration of how the love of God exceeds the limitations imposed by the humanity we share with Jesus. The generous love of God overflows, knowing no bounds. From a handful of small loaves and a couple of fish a multitude is satisfied and there is still plenty left over!

The words of the Prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: *Come to me and you will have good things to eat, rich food to enjoy; come to me and your soul will live.*

Jesus shows in what he does, feeding the five thousand, that God’s loving power surpasses our assessments of what is possible, exceeds all expectations, and is generous beyond measure.

For that wonderful love of God to be revealed by Jesus in those circumstances of the lakeside it was necessary for another person to be loving besides Jesus. The loaves and the fish belonged to a small boy. They were probably his lunch. It was not very much but it was all he had. He could have kept them for himself. But he was unselfish. He gave them away, trustingly and generously, for Jesus to use as he wished.

Perhaps his human loving was not yet as many faceted, as sensitive, as richly generous as that of the Master. But he was a good disciple in that gathering. He was aware of a need and he gave what he could to meet it – indeed, all that he could. And his humble offering became a revelation of God’s marvellous love.

Sometimes, when we look at the loving of Jesus, we can admire and perhaps be comforted that we are held in such love. But we can also feel that we fall very far short of this ideal. Do we see ourselves shining with such an immediate, responsive and wholehearted love? Of course, not!

And then, because we are so conscious of the littleness of our love we can feel inadequate as His followers, daunted by what He might ask of us. We will never measure up: we could never be as generous as Jesus - always giving, always attending, always serving, and always sacrificing myself for others' sake! Answering every need! On every occasion!

The story of today's Gospel should give us new heart. What it tells us is that if I just give the little I have with me at this moment – like the small boy – then the value of my gift will be increased by the power of God's grace. It is my trusting response to the immediate need which presses upon me which is important. If only I am ready and willing for that then my own little gift will be enriched by God's Holy Spirit of Love.

It is in such humble, such **small** giving, that my capacity to love becomes increased beyond my expectations! Until the time comes when I discover – to my amazement – that not only did my love answer that first need which called for my attention in some measure but many others besides – and that still I have some love left over!

As we make our self-offering in the Liturgy of this Mass let us be content to promise to give the little that we have to those who need us – as and when they need us – money (yes) but also our attention, our time, our skills. In such a humble pledge we become persons after Jesus' own heart, and his Divine power will work in us.

What we have to offer may seem small and inadequate, but in the power of God it will be augmented, and be abundant in its fruitfulness – beyond all our expectations: for God will surely give the increase. Our little will become great by God's grace.