

**MUCH FROM LITTLE**  
**17th Sunday in OT, July 25, 2021**  
**Deacon Robb Pailthorpe**

The feed corn has tasseled leaving a sweet smell in the evening air. Gardens are ready to burst forth with juicy tomatoes, tender peas and tasty green beans. Sweet corn and melon stands are beginning to pop up along county roads and city intersections. The bounty of Iowa – harvest time – is close at hand. And yet, with grocery store shelves packed with all that our country has to offer, there are those that are go hungry. Some estimates say over a third of the global population lacks year-round access to adequate food. It's hard to image that in a modern place like ours, where 40-percent of our food is wasted, people still go to bed hungry. And hunger was no stranger in Jesus' time either. After feeding 5,000 men, the tally of women and children not included, I think it's easy to see how the crowd was ready to lift up Jesus and make him their newest king – with it, they thought, was the promise of an ever-full belly and a chance to mold the Messiah. But

that's getting to the end of our story when we need to start at the beginning.

Today, we celebrate the only miracle story documented in each of the four Gospels – “The Miracle of the Fishes and Loaves” or “The Feeding of the 5,000,” a wonder echoed in our first reading.

We find Jesus along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd begins to assemble not to hear Jesus' teachings but because the people were hoping to see more signs, wonders and miracles. The motivation of many in the crowd was lacking... there were the groupies, the fans of Jesus just wanting to be near him for the sake of being near him or like a carnival attraction, to witness what new “act” Jesus might perform.

Nonetheless, from a mountain perch, Jesus looks at the sea of gathering people and presents a pop-quiz to St. Philip... “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” he asks. Philip fails the test understandably thinking in physical not spiritual ways... answering Jesus by saying, “There's no way we can feed these all of these people even if we had enough money.”

Philip may have been thinking in practicality... how would we transport such a quantity of bread if we could get it... how much flour would be needed... how many ovens... would there be enough ovens... are there ample bakers available... and bread needs time to rise... what about other ingredients like water and yeast... this is an impossible task... it's just easier to send the people away to fend for themselves. But, as we know, Jesus is known for conquering the impossible.

Trying to help his fellow disciple and excited to offer a solution, Andrew, Peter's brother, offers that he saw a boy with some fish and loaves. No sooner does he say it then realizes it is a pittance for such a crowd... "What good are these for so many," he says.

Let's look at this boy's lunch... he had five barley loaves usually the size of large dinner rolls. Barley loaves were usually eaten by the poor. They are less nutritious, less tasty and harder to digest than bread made of wheat. The two fish are probably small... meant to accompany his bread which is the main meal. The seven items were probably intended to be two meals. It seems unlikely that this boy

would end up saving the day but no more unlikely than the shepherd-boy David with his puny sling against the giant Goliath. The boy has a meager lunch but he offers what little bit he has and Jesus transforms that little bit into more than enough. Jesus often recognizes, blesses and multiples talent for the glory of God. Throughout scripture, we witness Jesus relying on those with a single talent to do most of the work that is done in his name.

A few weeks ago, at the end of Mass, a parishioner at St. Michael's made an impassioned plea for readers, Eucharistic ministers and ushers. After the church emptied, two names were found on the sign-up lists. At least there were two. St. Paul's has had a reoccurring bulletin announcement begging for readers... it's near the announcement asking for choir members which is near the request for ministers to take Communion to the homebound. Parish and Cluster Council elections were held in May with some seats going vacant others filled with a little arm twisting. Faith Formation is around the corner and I suspect there will be a plea for Catechists.

If you can read, that's a talent... if you can open a door, say "hello" and smile... that's a talent. If you can sing... that's a talent. God wants you to come forward so that he can bless your talent which will benefit the multitudes.

What if the boy had been unwilling to share his food? What if he said, "no" or "ask someone else?" What if he said, "I need this for myself," or "My little bit won't make a difference." Those of us who might be tempted to believe that we have too little to offer need to remember how our Lord multiplies the contributions of faithful people.

I often hear from parishioners that they fear that our cluster parishes are dying... few people involved, few attending Mass, few stepping forward with their talent. Sadly, they may be right. Our churches beg for help... that help is the life-blood of our faith community... sharing a talent rarely takes up much of our precious time and the more that are sharing, the lighter the load. I cannot stress enough that for our parishes to be a place of faith with a sense of God-centered community, for them to flourish, thrive and grow, people

must step forward. For those that are offering their talent, you are greatly thanked and appreciated.

There are many themes in our Gospel today. On this day, we look to the example set by boy, a boy who thought nothing of himself, surrendering what he had because the master had need of it. His generosity was magnified by God for benefit of thousands. Two thousand years later, we are still learning from the boy's gesture and God's miracle.

Like the crowds that surrounded Jesus with empty bellies and empty souls, our parishes hunger for volunteers to feed the families and churches of our cluster. Just as the boy stepped forward and said, "Here, have mine," we are implored to do likewise for the benefit of many and, in return, to be abundantly blessed!