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# It Is Never Enough, Until We Give It Away

## Biblical Reflection for 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, JULY 22, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- Today's Old Testament reading from 2 Kings 4:42-44 is a fitting prelude to John's version of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (6:1-21). The author of Kings tells us about one of Elisha's servants who doubts that 20 loaves of barley is enough to feed 100 people. Elisha, however, trusts the promise of the Lord and overrules his servant. The miracle vindicates Elisha's trust. The numbers fed are modest in comparison with the feeding of the 5,000 in John's Gospel!

Bread is a symbol of the person and work of Jesus in John's great Eucharistic teaching in Chapter 6, and this Eucharistic theme continues over the next four weeks of Scripture readings. Today's Gospel is John's marvelous story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. The various accounts of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, two each in Mark and in Matthew and one each in Luke and in John, indicate the wide interest of the early Church in their Eucharistic gatherings (e.g., Mark 6:41; 8:6; 14:22); and recall also the sign of bread in Exodus 16; Deuteronomy 8:3-16; Psalm 78:24-25; 105:40; Wisdom 16:20-21. The miraculous event, recounted by the four evangelists, points forward to the idea of life in God's kingdom as a banquet at which the Messiah will preside.

### Unique perspectives

Mark's readers saw this incident as an anticipation of the Last Supper (14:22) and the messianic banquet, both of which were celebrated in the community's Eucharists.

Matthew's addition of the number of people present and fed is significant, because the total figure could well have come to 20,000 or 30,000 people and the miracle is repeated again in 15:38. The sheer numbers of those fed give the feeding stories a distinct social character.

Luke links his feeding account with Jesus' prediction of his passion and his instructions about bearing one's cross daily (9:18-27). To celebrate the Eucharist in memory of Jesus (22:19) is to share not only his mission (9:1-6) but also his dedication and destiny, symbolized by the cross (9:18-27). The Eucharist is part of a journey in Luke's Gospel, nourishing and strengthening us for continuing faithfully in our way of life.

### Johannine details

John's multiplication story is a central part of Jesus' important teaching on the Bread of Life (6:1-15). This story is immediately followed by Jesus' walking on water. John's multiplication story has been expanded in the introduction by the addition of 1) the vague chronological marker "after these things"; 2) the specification of the place, Lake of Tiberias. This is also the place of the appearance of the risen Lord in John 21:1; 3) the motivation for the crowd -- they have seen Jesus' healings (signs); 4) the reference to the impending "Passover of the Jews."

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As in other Johannine miracle stories, the initiative for this miracle clearly lies with Jesus. Philip does not perceive that Jesus' question is an appeal to his faith and simply refers to the amount of money required. Jesus teases Philip to have bigger dreams and better hopes rather than to reduce them down to reality. In verses 14-15, the crowds respond correctly that Jesus is the messianic prophet, but misunderstand what they are really saying. The true nature of Jesus' kingship, which is not that of a national liberator, will only be revealed at his trial (18:33-37; 19:12-15).

One unique Johannine touch is the role of the young boy in this miracle story. What human reason did not dare to hope became a reality with Jesus thanks to a young boy's generous heart.

### Living bread

The multiplication of the loaves is an enduring image of the Eucharist. Jesus wanted to use this humble gift of a few loaves and fishes to feed a multitude, and more (12 baskets were left!). Logic and human reason often say to us, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish." But Jesus asks that even such meager provisions as these, together with the trust and generosity of disciples of every age, be stretched to their limits. "Let's see. It will never be enough until we start to give it away."

For the believer, Jesus is much more than a miracle worker; he himself is heavenly food. The believer will never again experience hunger or thirst. As bread sustains life, Jesus will sustain all who approach him in faith. To acknowledge Jesus as the living bread is the ultimate expression of God's love in Christ's death and glorification.

### Prolonging the miracle

Whenever I read the miracle stories of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, I recall these stirring words from Pope John Paul II's 1998 Apostolic Letter "dies Domini" -- On Keeping the Lord's Day (No. 71). These words illustrate what lies at the heart of today's miracle of the loaves and fishes and challenge each of us about our duties to truly put the Eucharist into practice in daily life: "The teachings of the Apostles struck a sympathetic chord from the earliest centuries, and evoked strong echoes in the preaching of the Fathers of the Church.

"St. Ambrose addressed words of fire to the rich who presumed to fulfill their religious obligations by attending church without sharing their goods with the poor, and who perhaps even exploited them: 'You who are rich, do you hear what the Lord God says? Yet you come into church not to give to the poor but to take instead.'

"St. John Chrysostom is no less demanding: 'Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk only then to neglect him outside where he suffers cold and nakedness. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same One who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,' and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me' ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices, when he is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.'

"These words effectively remind the Christian community of the duty to make the Eucharist the place where fraternity becomes practical solidarity, where the last are the first in the minds and attentions of the brethren, where Christ himself -- through the generous gifts from the rich to the very poor -- may somehow prolong in time the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves."

### Questions for reflection

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What does Jesus' Eucharistic presence mean for us? Does our participation in the weekly and daily celebrations of the Lord's meal transform us into people of gratitude, loving kindness, justice and charity? In what ways does the Eucharist symbolize the life we are living and our life symbolize the Eucharist? How do we express gratitude? Is the Eucharist giving direction to our life?

Do we not often wonder where we shall get the means to accomplish what seems good and necessary? Today's miracle reveals the extraordinary resources of life within each of us. In order to sustain our hopes, we must believe in miracles. We must feast on the Body and Blood of the Lord for our real energy and life.

[The readings for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time B are 2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 4:1-6; and John 6:1-15]

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