

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B  
(July 30, 2006)**

**More Than Enough**

Most if not all of you have probably seen the film or play *Oliver* and maybe you have read Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* that they are based on. And everybody who has seen the play or the movie remembers the scene where Oliver and the other children are finishing their meager breakfast but are still hungry, so they dare Oliver to go to the very stern and forbidding person who is dishing out the very unappetizing and watery porridge and ask for more, something that was strictly forbidden. You remember the scene, don't you? Oliver goes with his little bowl and says, "Please, sir, I want some more."

Well, you know, if Oliver and his friends had been there on that mountain with Jesus and the disciples and those thousands of people that Jesus fed, he would not have had to ask for more. There was plenty to eat, plenty – and plenty left over to take home to other hungry people who were not fortunate enough to be with them that day.

It's a familiar story, isn't it? And well it might be. It occurs six times in our Gospels – six times! It's in all four of the Gospels – that's unusual in itself. But we see it twice in two of the Gospels. That either means that Jesus fed an awful lot of people in his time, or the early Christians were so impressed by this story that they kept repeating it over and over. Perhaps both are true.

It's interesting and entirely appropriate that the Church pairs this passage with the first reading we heard from the Second Book of Kings where we are told that Elisha the prophet does pretty much the same thing Jesus does. He feeds many hungry people with just a little bit of food. Of course there is one significant difference. Elisha, we're told, feeds 100 people, counting everybody. Jesus on the other hand feeds five thousand men, not counting women and children. And that would have doubled or tripled the number of people fed. What the sacred writers are telling us is that the same power of God that was present in Elisha to feed hungry people was also present in Jesus – but in Jesus it was able to do much, much more than in Elisha. For John who wrote this Gospel this was a sign

that Jesus was the Messiah that the people had long awaited and who had come to fulfill their desires, to satisfy the hungers that drove them out of their towns into the desert and the mountain top where they could be with him and hear his loving words, feel his healing touch, and be nourished by the food he gave them.

When I hear or read or pray over this story in any one of its six versions, I think of Cs, the letter C – three of them: compassion, confidence, and community. Compassion: when Jesus saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them. He not only felt sorry for them, he suffered with them. He understood their hunger, and he wanted to do something about it. That's the first C, compassion.

Then confidence. Jesus was confident that these people could be fed. But his disciples were not. When they told him they could never buy enough food to feed all these people he asked if there was anything at all to eat. A young lad had five barley loaves and two fish, but as Andrew said, "What good are these for so many?" But Jesus was confident in the power of God. He took those few loaves, and the fish. He blessed them, he broke them, and he began to hand them out – and lo and behold there was enough for everybody and plenty left over. The little bit that was there and that seemed totally inadequate, with the power of God, became more than enough. That's the second C: confidence.

And after that: community, the third C. As we hear the story, Jesus could not do what he did without the help of others. He needed that young lad to come forward and share his bread and fish with others. He needed the disciples to seat the people and then to distribute the food. Jesus is forming community by what he is doing. And then there is perhaps the greatest miracle of all. The people started sharing with one another, passing around the bread and fish as they came from the disciples, and perhaps sheepishly bringing more bread from the folds of their garments, bread they had brought with them, but were unwilling to share until they saw the generosity of that young lad and what Jesus was doing with the little bit he had to offer. They began to care for one another in ways they had not done before. Jesus was creating community, a loving, caring community.

So there you have it: my spin on what these stories mean: three Cs, compassion, confidence, community.

But that's not the end of the story. After all, we are here, two thousand years later. We, too, have come in crowds, hungry, hungry for the word of God and hungry for the nourishment of the Bread of Life that continues to create community, because while we feast of the one bread that is the body and blood of Christ we become the Body of Christ, a community of loving, caring people. Then we go from this church ready to show that same love and concern for a hungry world outside these walls. There are many people who come to us with their empty bowls like little Oliver, and say, "I want some more; I need some more." And perhaps, like the disciples we will feel that what little bit we have to offer is inadequate. But remember, we are the Body of Christ, we are a community, and what may seem impossible to each of us individually, suddenly becomes possible when we all do it together. Like Jesus we start with compassion for those in need; then again like Jesus we are confident that the power of God can make our little bit more than enough.