Lent4(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**.

*"but what are they among so many?.”*

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 This is the mid-way point of the season, historically called “*Gaudete*” or Rose Sunday. Today is sometimes also called *Dominica Refectionis* or “Refreshment Sunday”. This does not refer to the coffee hour, but rather the common theme of “refreshment” in all our Propers today.

 Our Collect makes no bones about it by asking that " by the comfort of thy grace [we] may mercifully be relieved". Our Gospel very clearly contains also a clear picture of refreshment. The Old Testament lessen for MP this morning comes from Ezekiel, which would have been written during the Babylonian captivity, and talks of how the Lord will "refresh the remnant" that he brings back into Israel.

 Even our Epistle for this Sunday ties into the idea of relief. St. Paul is seldom easy reading. Just briefly, here he is making an allegorical or symbolic argument here. He is comparing Ishmael, the father of the Arab people, the son of Abraham born by their maid, Hagar, with Sarah's blessing to Jews still living under the Hebraic code of laws. These would be all the multitudinous rules of the Jewish *Mishna*, not just the OT ones requiring circumcision and the Ten Commandments, but all the washing, fasting, and food laws.

 St. Paul is saying that those who want to continue keeping all these laws are slaves to them, just as Sarah's maid was her slave. This is because those who have sexual relations outside of marriage are slaves to... physical passion. One is a slave to the law, the other a slave to the passion, but both are slaves nonetheless. And as we know from our own sad history, slaves are not free to do what they want or become what they want.

 Conversely, Isaac was born within marriage by two free parents AND was the result of God having promised Abraham and Sarah a child despite their.. "seniority". Thus, Isaac was the product of freedom notslavery, just as Christians are meant to be. He was free to do God's work. Comparatively, **we** are free to start a business, work for a company, waste our lives, or become a monastic.

 Focusing on our Gospel passage though we see an incident in which refreshment is very clear: hungry people getting fed. But, this passage ALSO instructs about freedom as well.

 Now this passage does not give us much in the way of details about this great miracle of Jesus. But scholars have filled in blanks. Jesus was crossing the Sea of Galilee or Tiberius, also called the Sea of Gennasaret, to get away from the crowds.

 The lake is about 4 miles across from Capernaum to where he landed. Jesus got out at the Northern end where the Jordan river flows in the western edge of the Decapolis region. A few miles inland up the river was the town of Bethsaida Julias. It should be noted that this was a different Bethsaida than appears elsewhere in the Gospel stories, the other being in Galilee.

 It was near the Passover. Thus, the whole area around the Sea of Galilee would have been flooded with pilgrims heading South towards Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims of that day customarily carried sufficient food for their journey with them since there were no kosher grocery stores.

 It is quite probable, however, that those in the area, having heard about Jesus and that he was nearby, went out of their way---made a day trip---to see this amazing teacher and miracle worker. By land the detour from Capernaum would have been about 9 miles each way, making it very much a full day's additional adventure even for an adult. Most likely then these pilgrims WERE indeed hungry, but unwilling to dip into their carefully calculated provisions.

 So when Jesus saw the people were hungry he felt sorry for them. Since his apostle Phillip was from this very town he asked Phillip where one might get food to feed them all, just as we do when we go on trips.

 Phillip, we recall, said it was hopeless. A denarius, sometimes called a “penny” in the KJ's, was equal to a laborer's pay for a day. Thus, two hundred denarii would have represented about two thirds of a year's labor given that Jewish workers took off every Sabbath and other Holy Days. Phillip pointed out that even that much money probably would not be enough even to give everyone a small snack.

 St. Andrew, most likely aware of Jesus' request to Phillip, had searched and found a young lad who had least had *some* food, and food which he was willing to share. Just as Andrew brought Peter, the Rock, to Jesus, Andrew brought this young boy to Jesus. Now the lad's food was little more than a nice picnic lunch. He had five barley loaves and a pair of small fishes. Barley was the bread of the poor, as opposed to the more expensive wheat grain bread. The fish were most likely akin to sardines since such fish were plentiful in the Sea of Galilee. These fish when pickled were famous throughout the Roman Empire.

 By bringing the lad to Jesus Andrew *enabled* a great miracle to occur. While Andrew too thought the situation looked dire, he had at least been willing to try to help. Without Andrew's effort in spite of the seeming futility the miracle would not have occurred. Likewise, without the lad being willing to surrender his lunch, unlike others present who undoubtedly had food with them, the miracle would not have occurred either. Jesus did not need **much** to work with to accomplish something great: here all he had was a little bit of effort with a dose of... generosity.

 And just how great it was this miracle! Everyone ate and had as much as desired. The Greek word used actually translates to "satiated", as we feel after Christmas dinner. That truly is amazing given the little bit Jesus had to work with. And then, in addition, they then took up twelve baskets of leftovers! (Much more than they started with.)

 These baskets almost certainly were those carried by Jesus' Apostles. The Jews then carried little baskets everywhere in part because of their need to “keep Kosher”, to keep their food laws. These baskets were sort of bottle shaped. Just as priests consume the particles and remains after each Eucharist, none of Jesus' miracle was to be left on the ground, wasted.

 Thus, we see that not only did Jesus work with whatever was offered to him, but he was exceedingly generous. Everyone got not only all that he really needed, and still there was extra!

 We need to keep this in mind the next time we find ourselves saying, “what can I do?” By giving or offering to Jesus whatever little we may have we enable HIM to work a great miracle. Conversely, if we decide instead that something is hopeless, like Phillip, or act miserly, in contrast to the lad, we may **prevent** a miracle from happening. Sharing what we have, however puny, can enable miracles.

 That knowledge, that refreshment, enables miracles and brings freedom from anxiety about and slavery to earthly worries that we would otherwise experience. And THAT is reason for *Laetare*, reason to ...rejoice. AMEN. +