

Homily based on the readings from December 4, 2024 (Isaiah 25.6-10a; Matthew 15.29-37)

As you may have noticed, today's readings are practically *overflowing* with references to abundance and health. We heard about a "feast of rich food and choice wines"; about God "destroy[ing] death forever"; about Jesus healing "the lame, the blind, the deformed, [and] the mute"; about Christ feeding the multitude with seven loaves and a few fish.

The overarching message is that our Heavenly Father is generous beyond belief, showering his children with bountiful blessings.

Beneath the surface, though, there are at least two other specific lessons we can take from these readings. The first is that, no matter how dire a situation may appear, the best thing we can do is to entrust the problem directly to God. It was actually quite reasonable for the disciples to be concerned about obtaining enough food for the hungry throng. In practical terms, this dilemma was intractable: "Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus, on

the other hand, had absolutely no difficulty overcoming these limitations – taking the small amount that was available and making it sufficient, even excessive. Human beings have to live according to a predetermined budget, but God can make the balance sheet work out however he wants.

Another theme from today's readings is God's boundless compassion for his children – particularly those enduring any kind of illness or affliction. Jesus did not feed the hungry and heal the sick to prove a point – to convince people of his divinity – but because he truly wanted to alleviate the suffering he encountered: “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat.” Even though we lack Jesus' supernatural abilities, we are still able to follow his example. We may be incapable of feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread, but we *can* – indeed, we *must* – imitate Christ's care and compassion for our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. If we look around our community – at the work being done by Catholic Charities, Saint Vincent de Paul Place, and

countless other organizations and individuals – we see the love and mercy of Christ being lived out on a daily basis. If we are not doing so already, every single one of us should get involved with at least one of these forms of ministry.

From a practical perspective, when we come face to face with the *immense* problems afflicting our society – hunger, homelessness, and addiction – to say nothing of abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment – there are two dangerous extremes that we absolutely must avoid. On the one hand, we cannot just leave everything to God and do nothing ourselves. On the other hand, we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenges we face – and also wind up doing nothing. We must always remember that God will transform our tiny contributions into whatever is needed, whenever it is needed, for whomever it is needed. Our job, as human beings, is not to solve the problems of the world – that is the sole prerogative of Jesus Christ. Our job is simply to labor in God’s vineyard, allowing our humble efforts to become a part of his great and wonderful plan – the

full scope of which lies beyond our mortal knowledge and understanding.

In the end, what is required from all of us is trust – trust that God will care for us, trust that God will guide us, trust that God will overcome the hunger, sickness, and decay that infects the world around us. *Even though we walk in the dark valley we fear no evil; for God is at our side. ... Only goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our lives; and we shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.*