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Deacon Lucio Caruso, Homilist
Isaiah 55:1-3
Romans 8:35, 37-39
Matthew 14:13-21

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
July 30-31, 2011

A story from Honduras

Hermana (Sister) Isabel was returning from a trip to the city. The sister worked with families who lived far out in the countryside. Most of the people were very poor. Sister knew that the children were often hungry.

She noticed a child waiting for her. It was little Amata. Hermana Isabel smiled. The name "Amata" meant lovable, and Amata certainly was.

The little girl jumped up and ran to her. In her fist was a bouquet of wildflowers. "I brought you a gift!" Amata exclaimed.

"Thank you! What beautiful flowers!" Hermana Isabel said. She looked in her bag, hoping she had something to give Amata. She found a small bread roll.

"And this is for you!" she said, wishing it was a whole loaf of bread. Amata put the roll in a pocket.

They said good bye, and Hermana Isabel went into her house. A little while later, she placed the vase of flowers near the window. Looking out, she saw Amata was still there. This time, her little brother Joaquin was there, too. Hermana Isabel watched and listened.

Taking the small roll from her pocket, and with eyes closed, Amata spoke a simple **blessing** of thanks. With her dirtied hands, she then **broke** the tiny loaf in half and **gave** part to Joaquin.

As Hermana Isabel watched them eating the bread, she thought of Jesus breaking the 5 loaves of bread and giving it to the apostles to feed the hungry crowds. Two thousand years later, across the world, a little girl gave of herself by sharing bread with a hungry little brother.

In the Gospel, Jesus is moved with pity for the vast crowd; many, the very poor of His day. He cures their sick and, like Amata did for her little brother, tends to their need for food.

Now the disciples insist that the folks "go and buy food for themselves." Jesus has a different economic theory, one we heard from the prophet Isaiah, "You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; come without paying and without cost."

In other words, food and sustenance, from God's point of view, is something everyone has a right to. God wants all to eat and be satisfied.

John Paul II, on a visit once to a poor barrio in Lima, Peru, said this to a million hungry people: "Every person is entitled to having bread on the table, including you who have no money!"

From the 17 million children in our own country who go hungry each night to the millions facing famine in Somalia, all have a right "to eat well."

There is an intimate connection between the Eucharist we celebrate here and tending to the hungers of the world.

Our gospel text teaches this by situating "the feeding of the crowd" within the pattern of how the Eucharist itself was celebrated in the early Christian Church, a pattern we follow to this day: "taking, blessing, breaking, giving."

Jesus "**takes**" the loaves and fish, says the "**blessing**," "**breaks**" the loaves, and "**gives**" them...

For Matthew's community and for us, the profound truth is the same:

We cannot separate the "**privilege**" of being fed the food of Christ's body and blood from the "**obligation**" of responding to those who hunger.

The "Eucharist commits us to the poor and to do everything possible to end the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting millions," Pope Benedict writes.

Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe puts it in these striking words: "If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world."

You and I have a part in making our celebration of the Eucharist complete. Today's gospel is very clear about this. The "giving" that goes on in the account of the loaves and fish isn't just done by Jesus.

"Give them some food yourselves," Jesus says. Of course, the disciples balk, "How far can 5 loaves and 2 fish go?"— A food scarcity issue - to be sure!

Jesus provides a solution to this problem, but gives the blessed and broken loaves to the disciples, "who 'in turn' give them to the crowds." They are not "off the hook"; the job of feeding is entrusted to them.

Jesus thus invites our cooperation to bring about the fulfillment of Isaiah's words, "that all people may one day eat well, delight in rich fare, and have life."

But exactly how will this happen? The sheer number of hungry in our world is so vast! Another miracle of multiplication is needed; only this time, what Jesus did with the loaves and fishes is done with us!

We are "**Taken**" by Jesus – the very word Church – ecclesia – means "to be taken or called out." In baptism, we were claimed-taken for Christ by the sign of His cross traced upon our foreheads.

We are "**Blessed**" by Jesus - At our baptism, were we not made holy and named a beloved child of God?

We are "**Broken**" by Jesus - Jesus breaks the smallness of our hearts, and tears at the comforts and security which shield us from the needs of our sisters and brothers.

We are "**Given**" by Jesus - Having been taken, blessed, and broken, we are given to the world as the living Body of Christ. Through us, a billion plus disciples, Jesus touches, heals, and feeds.

Here at Epiphany, helping at Dare to Care food sites, serving Backside meals, walking the yearly Hunger Walk, Planting a Row for the Hungry, our Honduras water purification project...are some of the ways we are given by Christ to the world.

Shortly, Fr. Randy will take, bless, break, and give bread that will become Christ Himself - given for us. But there is another miracle that happens here.

For as we unite the "loaves and fishes" of our lives with Christ's own offering, and are nourished by His body and blood, we, too, are transformed into Christ.

The Eucharist holds not only the mystery of Christ's Real Presence, but our own mystery as Christ's Real Presence to the world!