

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 112

Reading 1 - Isaiah 55:1-3

Thus says the LORD: All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18 R. (cf. 16) The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Reading 2 - Romans 8:35, 37-39

Brothers and sisters: What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel - Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have here." Then he said, "Bring them here to me," and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

This week’s homily synthesizes theological reflections based on the liturgical readings for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The central theme is the nature of God’s unconditional love and the essential role of human cooperation in manifesting that love within the world. Fr. Blair concludes that the mission of the Church is to communicate that God is a loving and caring God. This mission necessitates an "unceasing cooperation with God." To inappropriately limit this cooperation by claiming one has nothing to give or by focusing solely on self-interest—is described as "cooperation with the enemy." The goal for the faithful is to be "authentic lovers" who allow divine compassion to work through their own hands, just as the disciples distributed the bread to the hungry crowd.

Divine Compassion: The Call to Cooperation

The Certainty of Divine Love

Unconditional and Dependable

Unlike human relationships, God's love is not earned by personality, looks, or achievements.

The Inseparable Bond

Neither death, life, nor any power can separate us from the love of God.

The Model of Human Cooperation

"Bring what you have"

Jesus asks for our limited resources (5 loaves, 2 fish) to perform the impossible.

God as a "Team Player"

Christ involves human agency—farmers, bakers, and disciples—rather than acting as a solo performer.

Abundance from Scarcity

Twelve wicker baskets remained after feeding over five thousand people from one small offering.

	Divine Love (The Source)	vs.	Human Love (The Struggle)
Requirement	Free gift; no cost		Often feels earned or conditional
Stability	Unconditional; cannot be lost		At risk of loss due to failure
Focus	Compassionate; sacrificial		Often selfish or "me-centered"

God’s compassionate love, and a call to human cooperation.

If you look at the three readings apart from the psalm, what you see is the first one is about the theological virtue of hope, the second faith, and in the gospel, love. I want to focus on the theme of love, by centering our attention on the feeding of the multitude as a sign of God’s compassionate love and a call to human cooperation. One of the reasons our relationship with God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is so unique, is that we don't have to earn the love, but so often, it seems with each other, we do. God’s love is unconditional and dependable; we don't have to be afraid of losing it. But it seems with each other, we are always at risk of losing the love of another. We don't have to earn God’s friendship by our great personality, good looks, or impressive achievements, which so often seem to be the case among us, even in the Church. When you look at the world you see that this is what so many people striving for, especially with the rise of and the ubiquitousness of social media. The cultural notions of ‘looksmaxing’ or ‘hot fit’ would have no chance of infecting the hearts and minds of the faithful if we were truly immersed in the love of God. We won't lose God’s love because of our failures or weaknesses, but we are so easily ready to give up on each other. As regards the love of God, the Second Reading tells us, *"neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* We are called to this same love; for God, each other and ourselves.

Recognizing that although much suffering is caused by human agency due to a lack of authentic love, we are also relieved to see that through human responsibility, generosity, and participation in God's work; the world is indeed a more humane place than it would be in the absence of this love. So, we must reflect more deeply on Jesus' compassion, so as to learn from him. Christ manifests the love of God for us in the Gospel reading where we hear that he cannot resist us, even as he mourns his cousin. The most obvious lesson is about Christ's heart. Jesus' compassion leads him to put aside his own plans for the sake of the needs of those gathered. And then it overflows in a miracle so awe-inspiring that it is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels.

The ups and downs of life—whether they are spiritual, emotional, physical, or material, whether they are personal tragedies or natural disasters—are in no way a challenge for God's loving care for us. They are an affirmation of our freedom, of our having been made in their image and likeness. They help us to recognize our need for a savior, to repent and believe; *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ..."* We might reflect ourselves, on the nature of our love for others and how we react to sudden and unexpected calls on our time and energy.

This becomes a model for how God continues to work through people today—through the Church, through service, and through each person willing to share what they have, in love. The key to our understanding of all of this, is in the second reading; the certainty of God's love. God's love does not have to be earned and cannot be lost. Though the apostles have very little food at hand and what the Lord asks of them, the way in which he calls them to love these their neighbors, makes no sense to them; Jesus calls them to act anyway, inviting them to deeper faith and to offer what they have, for love of their neighbor, so that divine compassion can work through them.

There are all sorts of selfish ways in which we can be reluctant to love as God calls us, but we can also be reluctant to give help because we think we have nothing to give, such as in the Gospel reading today. The disciples respond to Jesus, *"We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."* Reasonably, the Apostles determined that it would be best if the people all went home. After a long day, they try to get Jesus to see the good sense of this plan. But Jesus looks at them, and with unfailing love, says, *"There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves."* Imagine their shock, as they understand him, the Master wants them to feed thousands. They look at each other in confusion and apprehension; it makes no sense. But it does highlight for us that Jesus is making the spiritual truth of Isaiah 55 his own. He wants to disabuse us of believing that we can find lasting fulfillment by focusing on what is material, natural, and reasonable to us and that God is indifferent to our needs. It's at this point we can begin to understand the words of Isaiah in the first reading, the actions of Jesus in the Gospel, and the confidence of St. Paul in the second reading.

Jesus, feeding the multitude, brings the material and spiritual human needs together, emphasizing that neither is properly met without God and that God seeks our effort and cooperation in meeting these needs. The disciples' role is central because Jesus does not bypass them. As I stressed last year, Jesus is a team player, not a solo act. He feeds each one of us with his Word here and now and his sacraments through the Church. He feeds those outside the church, those brothers and sisters who are absent, especially others whose hearts he's drawing close. He feeds them with the light of his truth through each of us. If we are indeed striving to be who he calls us to be; authentic lovers. In the feeding of the multitude, he could have fed the crowd directly, but instead he tells the disciples, *"give them some food yourselves."* That command makes them participants in the miracle rather than spectators. Their role has several layers. They recognize the crowd is hungry and that the situation is beyond their practical resources. They feel the limits of human ability. Their response — *"we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish"* — shows how

inadequate their resources seem. They are invited into cooperation. Jesus asks them to offer what little they have, trusting that God can work through it. They become instruments of compassion. Jesus' care reaches the crowd through their hands. They distribute what he blesses. They model the Church's mission. The reflection connects their role to ours: God's love and care are often communicated through human action, service, generosity, and responsibility.

Their role shows that God's compassion does not remove human responsibility; it calls it forth. Jesus provides the power and abundance, but he asks his followers to participate by offering what they have, even when it seems insufficient. The bread is the fruit of the labor of the bakers. The wheat is the fruit of the labor of the farmers. The fishermen who catch the fish and feed their families. Yes, God helps to bring forth the fruits but not without involving our labors. We are always intimately involved in the work of God for the care and compassion of human beings, for the care of creation.

As we all know, it's too easy to blame God for everything that goes wrong. It is too easy to blame governments, too easy to see these things as other people's problems. But, at minimum, we share blame in so far as the consequences of our own sins become part of what shapes social / economic / political structures and affects others directly and in a cascading way. So, the problems of others are indeed also ours. That's not all, even if we could say with any degree of confidence that nothing about our own exercise of freedom has adversely affected others, we remain united as a human family and certainly for disciples of Christ we are united by the bonds of faith and are called to love the neighbor as ourselves, regardless of the cause of their problem. Jesus bore no guilt of his own, but he sacrificed all for love of us. We cannot say to ourselves, I'm just going to put my head down, focus on me. I'll do me, you do you. I'll live my truth, you live yours. This is not the way of God.

Jesus said, *"Love each other as I have loved you."* We need to take responsibility for living that love. We need to take responsibility for much of what happens in the world that is a direct consequence of our choice to use our God-given freedom in disobedience for selfish purposes. We enjoy the blessings of humble obedience and suffer the consequences of our disobedience in the exercise of our human agency as it relates to our freedom, the freedom we exercise to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves, or not. A great deal of human suffering in the world has been caused by us, it's true. But a great deal of good is also done by us in cooperation with God and according to the will of God.

We know we are made for more. We know when that love fails. We know what we desire, desire for ourselves in the depths of our hearts. We desire to be loved by others as God loves them and us. We desire to know God's love. Whether we believe it possible or not, we desire it. This desire can only be satisfied by our recognition of our need for a savior. To humbly realize our need and that the only true help comes from the Lord. I need to repent and believe, repeatedly, so that I am consistently, constantly free to love as God loves fully, and fruitfully. For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son. That is the depth of the nature of the love of God for us, and stunningly the love he calls us to have for others. We know from our own failures that we are not capable of that kind of love. We're just not. Not every day, not all the time. But I'm not alone. This is not just up to me. God in his great love has made it possible. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. By the grace and power of God, I can love this way. Wow.

Jesus says "Bring me what you have. Bring to me what you have and watch what I do. With the little you bring me, I can meet the needs of thousands. Let me blow your mind. The scriptures, they speak to us of what we can't imagine on our own. They speak to us of the kind of healing that we dare not hope for. They speak to us of who we can be and the fears we can overcome. They speak to us of the love that we are capable of, in Him. And this is why St. Paul can say what he says with such confidence. These words at the heart of our faith are the foundation from which Paul endured much. Persecution, bad luck, division in the early church, competition, people messing around with the gospel message, people putting him down, all

the things that he dealt with, he knew he was firmly rooted in this truth. And that helped to make it possible for him become more and to love more; even in his imperfections, even when he had little to give. God raised him up. God said, "I know you're not worthy, but in answer to your prayers, I will make you worthy, and your work in my power and grace will meet the spiritual and material needs of so many more thousand than you have seen me feel.

Our mission necessitates our commitment to sharing in the work of God to communicate that God is a loving and caring God and putting inappropriate limits on what ought to be my unceasing co-operation with God, is ultimately co-operation with the enemy.

His love for us feeds us and flames Our love moving us in humble obedience, joy, passion, eagerness to go out and love our neighbor as ourselves to love as Christ loved us. Extraordinary

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Authentic Lovers	Individuals who strive to be who God calls them to be by reflecting His truth and love to others, both inside and outside the Church.
Everlasting Covenant	The renewed, eternal promise made by God to His people, specifically identified in Isaiah as the benefits assured to David.
Hot Fit	A contemporary social media term mentioned in the text as a symptom of people striving to earn love and approval through physical appearance.
Human Agency	The exercise of God-given freedom by humans to choose to love God and others, or to act out of selfishness and disobedience.
Lexio Divina	A traditional practice of scriptural reflection and prayer mentioned as a way to engage with the themes of hope, faith, and love.
Looksmaxing	A cultural trend focused on maximizing one's physical attractiveness; the text cites this as a distraction from the immersion in God's unconditional love.
Ordinary Time	The liturgical period in which the featured readings (Lectionary 112) take place, specifically the Eighteenth Sunday.
Pity/Compassion	The internal movement of Jesus' heart that led him to cure the sick and feed the hungry, even while he was mourning.
Principalities	One of the various spiritual or earthly powers listed by St. Paul in Romans that are incapable of separating the faithful from the love of God.
Team Player	A description of Jesus used to emphasize that he does not act as a "solo act" but involves his disciples and the Church in his miraculous work.