

July 29, 2012

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today, we are in Dublin, the capitol of Ireland, and an original Viking settlement. It is the site of the 1916 Easter Rebellion, which eventually set Ireland free after 800 years of English domination. Ireland, also in the 19th century, suffered a great famine. It caused an exodus of vast numbers of its people to other lands, including America. The Irish have never forgotten the famine, and wherever famine breaks out across the world, the Irish are often quick to respond with donations and help. Hunger casts a long memory.

Today Jesus feeds the multitude with a few loaves and fishes. And when the feeding is over, he directs the disciples to pick up the fragments left over. To do so and “fill 12 wicker baskets.”

For many years in treating with this gospel and preaching about it, I would stress the miracle but there is much more to it than that.

Far better I think to consider Jesus’ concern for the hungry. If we are to be the followers of Jesus, then we must not only hear what he says, we must also do what he did: feed the multitude. Here in the USA we have the greatest agriculture system in the world, and yet we have hungry people—many of them children.

Those who go about today preaching “smaller government” seem to mean cut back government efforts and outreach in all directions, starting with the poor, except increase expenditures on more weapons of destruction. There is something anti-gospel about this whole way of thinking.

Is this an exaggeration? Hardly. In the Farm Bill just passed by congress there was a \$4.5 Billion cut in expenditures for food stamps. This will have dramatic effects on half a million of the poorest of the poor.

Jesus fed the hungry and the people he fed were mostly the poor. The “Government” is not some vague entity in Washington siphoning away all of our hard earned money. The Government is US in a democracy. And what the government does, or does not do, is what you and I do or do not do.

SO, you and I have just said to the poor, through our government: “Well you poor people even though we have the greatest harvests in the world, we will cut down on your food supply. Go fend for yourselves.”

I talked to a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society last week and he told me, “Well we are approaching the hottest time of the year and a time where the disabled, the unemployed, those living on the margins, must decide which of their monthly bills they can pay. One of the bills many cannot pay is their meager food bills, so they will be flooding us with requests for emergency food.”

(More will be over flooding St. Vincent de Paul in future months because WE—the U.S. government has cut 4.5 billion dollars from food stamp aid.)

In the Second Reading today, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians and you and I “to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received...” He tells us to “bear with one another through love.” That means as Christians we are to bear one another’s burdens.

A terrible burden is hunger.

As Jesus feeds the multitudes today, it is an opportune time to be reminded of the needs of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

It is an opportune time to become interested in its ***Voice of the Poor*** Committee, which tries to raise a voice for the poor. You can read more about ***Voice of the Poor*** on this website or by googling: ***St. Vincent de Paul, Voice of the Poor.***

Finally there is a National Organization very deserving of support: ***Bread for the World.*** It is an ecumenical and non-partisan hunger lobby that works for systemic change in addressing the problem of hunger. Google ***Bread for the World*** and learn about their efforts.

“I Paul, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received...”
Eph. 4:1 from today’s second reading.