

Vicar's Sermon

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Title : Feeding the Five Thousand
Author : Rev. Peter Holzapfel, St. Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcester.
Subject : Mothering Sunday - Feeding the Five Thousand.

Well, all mothers are obviously different, but if I was to think of two words that summed up my mother they would be "lovingly resourceful." It never ceased to amaze me that no-matter when I called, day or night, she was always able to provide a good meal! It seemed to me that my mother's kitchen cupboard was a bit like the cupboard in "Narnia" in that it went on for ever and there was no end to the delights it contained. I didn't need to make an appointment to be welcomed and nourished by my mother: a fine example of "cupboard love."

And that's why today's Gospel reading is such an appropriate one for Mothering Sunday when we give thanks not just for our mothers but also traditionally for Mother Church and all the love and spiritual nourishment that we receive through it from God. Those five thousand people were not there by prior arrangement or by appointment and yet Jesus fed every one of them. No one went away hungry just as I never left my mother's home without a full stomach.

And yet it's not just the food but more importantly how it's prepared and offered. And by preparing I don't mean whether you have your vegetables rock hard or whether they've been boiled to disintegration! In fact if my mother knew that I'd be arriving at about mid-day she'd put the vegetables on at about 9.0am! They did in those days! No, I don't mean that but the fact that it was all prepared and given with love. Not all mothers are wonderful cooks but if they love their families then you can taste the love in the food and it's that which makes it delicious.

And the same was true of Jesus and that in some wonderful and miraculous way those five barley loaves and two small fish fed five thousand people because Jesus offered them with love. In the same way that He was later to offer His body on the Cross because of His love for you and me and thus His body became the bread of life which has no end. There's a very close parallel between this story of the feeding of the five thousand and the body of Jesus that feeds the whole world for eternity.

Another thing that we thank God for today is the example and inspiration that our mothers have set before us. My own memory, although I know that all of our experiences are different, is a woman who would have done anything and given everything for me and whose love knew no bounds. And it's certainly true that those people on the Galilean hillside could not have been fed had it not been for the generosity of that young boy who sacrificed his few small loaves and fish. And why did he do this? Was it not that he observed in Jesus someone whose heart and intentions were completely filled with sacrificial love? Perhaps he had an inkling, however vague, that standing here next to him was the Saviour of the World. He responded to the love he witnessed just as we might respond to the love that we have received from our mothers. So many mothers over the years have given their all for their children even their own lives and isn't this a wonderful reflection of what Jesus has done for us and shouldn't it inspire our own generosity and willingness to give our lives for others.

And, of course, the boys' offering was meagre: five small loaves and two fishes: but what are they among so many? But, meagre though it was, Jesus did not refuse it but blessed it and multiplied it. I remember our children giving their mum some pretty meagre gifts when they were young: perhaps a few stars stuck on a piece of card or a love heart roughly cut out with "I Love You" written on it: and yet to their mother who received them they were like the Crown Jewels. She has kept them now for over twenty years. Everything is accepted with love and thankfulness and that's exactly how God views our offerings however small and meagre they may be.

And then, of course, at the end there is the clearing up! A task that is so often left to mothers but I hope not on Mothering Sunday. Jesus said "Collect the fragments that are left so that nothing may

be wasted and they filled twelve baskets full of scraps.” Jesus certainly believed in taking your litter home after a picnic. But, the fact is, that it wasn’t litter and it wasn’t thrown away. Jesus said “let nothing be wasted” and isn’t that an echo of what many mothers have said over the years? “There’d be somebody in Africa very thankful for those greens! Waste not, want not!”

And with Jesus nothing and no one is wasted and everyone is welcomed into the Kingdom of God. You may be a little seemingly insignificant scrap in the history of the world but you’re of immense value to God and that is irrespective of who and what you are. Whether you’re Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jew or nothing at all you’re of infinite worth to God for no other reason than that you’re a human being. My mother’s magical ability to make food stretch extended beyond me and included my friends. “Oh, mum: is it OK if David comes home for tea? “ Of course it was and mother always welcomed them. She might warn me occasionally “don’t get too close to his head I think he’s got nits!” but she never rejected them. And, just like Jesus, nothing and no one was to be wasted or rejected.

And so, you see, it’s no wonder that we call it Mother Church and that over the centuries people have given thanks not only for their mothers but also for the church, the body of Christ, who is the spiritual mother of us all.”

Amen.

Peter

Rev. Peter Holzapfel

vicar@stmaryskempsey.org.uk

www.stmaryskempsey.org.uk