

Homily: April 12, 2024

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we celebrate these Easter days, God grants us glimpses of ways to live new lives, fuller lives, and lives in abundance. Our response is to be open to and bold about new ways to live a new life. Our compassionate God accompanies us, and we acknowledge God's powerful and gentle presence, calling out, "Lord, have mercy."

Two life-giving elements in today's scripture can inspire you and me. I am consoled and challenged by wise Gamaliel's warning to his colleagues who wanted to get rid of Jesus' disciples: "You may even find yourselves fighting against God." Gamaliel believed that whatever is of God will last.

I often look at us Crosiers, who have existed for over 800 years. Although that length of existence is encouraging, the challenge is for us to do what indeed is the will of God. If we do the will of God, we will continue to grow and provide "food" for the hungry in many ways—whether as Crosiers or as families. As long as the Lord only is our light and salvation, we will continue in this world.

The second life-giving element that struck me was Jesus' request to gather the fragments so that nothing would be wasted. The twelve baskets of bread and fish remind us of what often happens when we have a potluck meal: Everyone's generous contributions result in a considerable amount of leftovers.

However, I hear something more in Jesus' request. For him, a little bit—just five loaves and two fish, to open a meal for thousands is worth gratitude and distribution. And the fragments are essential.

Jesus tells us that all kinds of little bits and fragments are essential. These may be fragments of time, fragments of skills, fragments of energy, or smaller numbers of a group that are worth gratitude and usefulness. The smaller numbers of Crosiers, especially in our Order's northern and western parts, may feel like a few fragments—a few leftover crumbs. Comparing our numbers now with what we once were may tempt us to settle for simply doing the best until we blip out. We may feel overwhelmed facing the mounting challenges of our present society and church.

The apostles could have felt like useless fragments right after the crucifixion. They could have said, "Let's wait until it's safe out there and then simply return to our families and previous lives." The resurrected Christ was not done with his fragmented and fragments of apostles. Despite restrictions, jailings, floggings, and court trials, they spawned a

multiplication of disciples by the thousands. These fruits of the resurrected Christ working through the apostles further fed them with good spirit and courage to keep going.

The same resurrected Christ is working among us, too. And he continues to insist, "Gather the fragments left over so that nothing will be wasted." May receiving the tiny fragment of Christ's mystical body remind us of how precious every little bit of love is.

Additional notes:

In the first reading, the apostles were flogged, and when they left the court, "They rejoiced that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." I recall being named a murderer along with Bishop Al and Fr. Ed when we stood on the side of an employee of the diocese who was being accused of killing another diocesan employee from another tribe. After an appeal to a higher court, the truth finally did win out. But only after several months more did the accusing tribal members return to the church and no longer threaten the family they had been accusing falsely.