

## Homily: July 28, 2024

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On this 17<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Sunday, Pope Francis calls us to celebrate our grandparents and elders. God's abundant love often came to us uniquely through our grandparents and elders. Prompted by the scripture readings today, we thank God for feeding us more than plenty of food, love, and mercy. We acknowledge God's boundless mercy by praying, "Lord, have mercy!"

The Gospel of John is always rich with layers of meaning. Every word holds a more profound mystery and truth. John's Gospel has its own unique way of being nutritious food for our souls—as individuals and as communities—this Crosier community, this Crosier Village worshipping community, Buen Sembrado Group, the ESEC spiritual directors, Companions of the Holy Cross, our neighborhoods, and more.

In this Gospel, the word "**fragments**" (**fragmentos**) struck me as particularly rich in meaning. Jesus said, "Gather the **fragments** left over so that nothing will be wasted." They gathered twelve wicker baskets with **fragments**. All the little pieces were essential for Jesus. After all, it was a boy's **little bit of food** that Jesus accepted as good enough to start a meal for thousands. He took the meager five loaves and two fish, gave thanks, and distributed them. Why might Jesus have had such high regard for the **little bits**?

I believe that Jesus knew himself to be a highly regarded **little bit** in the whole of God's creation. At his baptism, which opened his ministerial phase of life, God's voice thundered a precious message to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son." This one human being, born in little Bethlehem and raised in non-famous Nazareth in the tiny country of Israel, recognized himself as a divine fragment—beloved and spirit-filled by God. No wonder Jesus prohibited wasting any precious fragments.

Jesus started with the boy's little bit of food that eventually became way more than needed, with twelve baskets of leftovers not to be wasted. Jesus began a worldwide mission to save all humanity from darkness and death by sin. A HUGE GLOBAL project! Jesus chose twelve simple and ordinary fragments of humanity—fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot rebel—ordinary folks—each one precious in the eyes of Jesus. Religious leaders resisted Jesus from the beginning. Even Jesus' twelve chosen disciples didn't believe him on the boat in the storm. They made other mistaken estimations about him, deeming him king-to-be of Israel.

Jesus, who invited his followers to become like little children, didn't stop his tiny and imperfect mission. In spite of Jesus and nearly all his apostles experiencing crucifixion, Jesus and his small band exploded into thousands soon after Pentecost. They blossomed into a church of over one billion Catholics today. The few – the tiny bit of disciples became the many for a global mission not yet finished.

In light of a mission still in progress, Jesus does a significant act at the end of the Gospel. "Jesus withdrew again to the mountain alone. Jesus knew the people were convinced he was Israel's long-awaited prophet and new king. Jesus does not fall for the fame and glory of kingship. He

had a much more critical ministry, namely, to **create a new world where all people would share to the point of having leftovers not to be wasted. All needs of humanity are to be fulfilled.**

There is a strong message here for wealthy nations and people like us who are blessed with plenty but, unfortunately, have become one of the most wasteful nations on earth. In addition, we aren't yet serious enough to eventually stop using fossil fuels and other materials that contribute to global warming and jeopardize Mother Earth's life. Jesus calls us to figure out ways to stop wasting and protect Mother Nature's life.

How do we get the strength to carry out Jesus' unfinished mission? By consuming together Jesus' precious and divine fragments in our communion. This way, we also fulfill St. Paul's call to be ONE. The Eucharist binds and bonds us together as one community. In our oneness, we will more readily discover how to stop wasting our resources and how to respect every little one, whether that little one is a child, a fetus in a pregnant mother, a lonely elder in a care facility, a person feeling too little and too unworthy, someone on death row or incarcerated, to mention a few examples.

Jesus said, **"Gather the fragments left over so that nothing will be wasted."**