

Homily for the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B 2021 – Fr Francis Afu

Jesus Took, Gave Thanks, and Distributed

Friends, it is quite common to read the Scripture, the Bible as man's Theology—that is, the science of God. But such reading is often superficial. At a deeper level, the Bible, Abraham J. Heschel remarks, is God's Anthropology. It is less about *who God is* and more about *who God want us to be*. It is about what God expects of us, and how we have, or are responding to him. It is about God revealing to us in Jesus how we can gravitate towards him and become God.

This understanding of the Bible gives us the sense that the Bible describes who we are right now and points us forward to who we can be. Every text in the Bible communicates these two dimensions. In John 6:1-15, we find these dimensions playing out. John tells the story of five characters: the crowd, Philip, Andrew, the small boy with the five loaves and two fish, and Jesus. The crowd is hungry. Philip's strength is money. Andrew is a man for whom nothing is good enough. The kid generously gives away all he had. And Jesus tells *them who they can be*.

How? Jesus took what the boy had—five loaves and two fish. He gave thanks to God, pointing them to God, the giver of every good thing. He then distributed the loaves and fish to five thousand men. Unlike the Synoptics, John made it a point that Jesus himself distributed the loaves and fish to the crowd. Typical of John, he emphasises the kind of king Jesus is, and how Jesus is reorienting our focus and destiny. John is simply saying, God wants us to be—giver.

So John's Jesus reveals an Anthropology that is *hope-filled*. He sees us and describes us as a bundle of possibilities. We are not limited by what is given us, but by our attitude to who we are and what we have. Jesus' attitude is in taking what is given, that is, what we have, and accepting who we are. It is also an attitude of thanksgiving; the Eucharist, that *space* where we bring ourselves as we are to worship God. And finally, it is an attitude of mission, of giving.

Thus, Jesus urges us not to sit back and lament about what we do not have, rather he asks us to give what we have. Jesus wants us to take what is available, give thanks to God and give it out. Miracles happen at the point of giving. Until the five loaves were distributed, they were merely five loaves. But as soon as Jesus started to distribute them, they multiplied. That which Andrew said was not good enough to feed five thousand people turned out to be more than enough.

In real life, this is how miracles happen. Everything multiplies not by hoarding it, but by giving it away. Saint Pope John Paul II describes this as the *Law of Giving*. We all grow and become more according to the measure in which we give ourselves away. For instance, Grandma Bev accepts the children and grandchildren God gave her. She thanks God daily for them, not because they are perfect, successful, but because they are God's gifts. And the more she gives thanks, the easier it is for her to love them, and the deeper they, in turn, learn and love others.

Imagine the miracles that would happen every minute if we all imbibe Jesus' attitude as Grandma Bev did! That will be the working of God's Anthropology, our true vision, and possibilities. An Anthropology that tells us, our grandparents have a place in our lives. They are not defined by the frailty of old age, but by their ability to give themselves away by dreaming of a better world of justice, peace, and a civilization of love; by sharing their memory of the past, the wisdom learned therefrom, and praying for us and for God's kingdom to come.

This becomes an invitation for us to learn from our grandparents how they participated in the miracle of our lives. We can learn what they had to sacrifice for us to grow and be the man or

woman we are. We can tell stories of the ripple effect of their giving even after they have gone to God. We can also stand in awe at the effect of their praying and dreaming. And we will realise by celebrating our grandparents that God wants us to be *givers*, not *hoarders* of his gifts.