



MIRACULOUS STONE SOUP BRINGING HOME MOM AND DAD

Today we listened to Matthew's account of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This story is told six times in the four gospels. This tells us that it was regarded as a very important story in the life of the early church. The story anticipated the miracle of the eucharist in which Jesus would take a little of the bread and wine and transform them and use them to feed thousands of hungry souls.

In his book on Sunday homilies, Fr. Flor McCarthy tells the story of the Miraculous Stone Soup to drive home the sharing aspect of today's gospel.

One day a village woman was surprised to find a well-dressed stranger at her door asking for something to eat. 'I'm sorry', she said, 'But I've nothing in the house right now.'

'Not to worry,' said the amiable stranger. 'I have a soup stone in my bag; if you will let me put it in a pot of boiling water, I'll make the most delicious soup in the world. A large pot, please.'

The woman gave him a pot. He put the stone into it and filled the pot up with water. As he put it on the fire she whispered the secret of the soup stone to a neighbour. Soon all the neighbours had gathered to see the stranger and his soup stone. When the water began to boil, the stranger tasted a spoonful and exclaimed, 'Very tasty! All it needs is some potatoes.'

"I have potatoes at home," shouted one woman. In a few minutes she was back with a large quantity of sliced potatoes, which were placed in the pot. Then the stranger tasted the brew again. 'Excellent!' he said, adding, 'If we only had some meat, this would become a tasty stew.'

Another housewife rushed home to bring some meat, which the stranger accepted graciously and deposited in the pot. When he tasted the broth again, he rolled his eyes heavenwards and said, 'Delicious! If only we had some vegetables, it would be perfect.'

One of the neighbours rushed off home and returned with a basket of carrots and onions. After these had been put in, the stranger tasted the mixture, and in a voice of command said, 'Salt and sauce.' 'Right here,' said the housewife. Then came another command, 'Bowls for everyone.' People rushed to their homes in search of

bowls. Some even brought back bread and fruit.

Then they all sat down to a delicious meal while the stranger handed out large helpings of his incredible soup. Everyone felt strangely happy as they laughed and talked and shared their very first common meal. In the middle of the merriment the stranger slipped quietly away, leaving behind the miraculous soup stone, which they used any time they wanted to make the loveliest soup in the world.

That Jesus could feed all those people with five loaves and two fishes must have seemed as impossible and ridiculous as that the stranger could make soup from a stone.

Sandbagged

Reflecting on today's gospel, Jay Cormier writes:

It has been a horrible spring and summer in the Midwest. Heavy rains and deadly storms have caused massive flooding that devastated homes and farmlands in Iowa, Missouri and seven other states.

*Joe Blair owns a heating, ventilation and air-conditioning business in Iowa City. In an essay in **The New York Times** (June 21, 2008), Blair writes about the first and only defense against the rising waters of the swollen Iowa river: sandbagging.*

"Fifty or so people in a line were passing sandbags one to the next. Some were already waist deep in rising water. . . The first bag was heavy, maybe 50 pounds. I received it from a tall guy in a beard, turned and passed it to a woman wearing a Milwaukee Brewers cap. I had started my sandbagging career at the bottom rung. I didn't feel too bad about it because, as I quickly discovered, there is only one rung. . . "

"Passing sandbags is a personal thing. You're face-to-face with the person passing you the bag, as well as the person to whom you pass it. The line may be 300 feet long. But it's not long for you. It's intimate, a three-person event. You take. You turn. You give. You get to know people. Not through conversation, but by the way they hand you the bag—the way they work. . . "

When Joe Blair and his neighbors finished later that night, "we were proud of our work." Then everyone went home to wait. But around midnight, Blair went back to the levee.

"Everything was still except the water," Blair writes. "As I stood in the darkness, a guy rides up from behind

me on a bike. He dismounted and pulled off his helmet. It was the tall guy with the beard. We stood and looked at the river. After a few moments, someone else approached. . . We all stood together, looking out. 'It's a nice wall we built,' the big guy said. We nodded.

"A friend of mine is angry about the time we spent bagging sand. He says our levee didn't matter, the water having risen well over the top of it. 'Just more to clean up when the water recedes,' he said. 'It was a waste of time.'

"And he's right, I know. But he's wrong, too."

The people who have endured death and destruction in the Midwest have discovered the power of community—what can happen when a group of individuals put aside their own fears and needs for the sake of the common good. When confronted by his disciples with the need to feed the crowds, Jesus first challenges them to give something from what they have. They manage to come up with a few pieces of bread and fish—and with that, Jesus works the miracle. In much the same way, Jesus challenges us to perform our own miracles of creating community by giving of our time and resources to take on the work of the gospel—feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, seeking out the lost and forgotten, teaching to all the good news that God is our loving Father.

If only we had the Political Will to resolve the world hunger issue.

In our first reading today, Isaiah says: *All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat!*

Reflecting on this verse, Alice Camille writes:

If you awoke this morning with the power to solve world hunger and thirst, I just know you'd go right out and do it. You'd barely stop for a cup of coffee, just thinking of those needy millions depending on you in their suffering. You would use this power even if it involved sacrifice and difficulty, because basically, you're a good person. You care about your fellow human beings. You feel compassion. Your heart works.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs has been suggesting for years that, in fact, we do have the power to end world hunger. What we don't have is the will—that is, the political will—to get behind the policies that would make it happen. While as individuals we're well-meaning and kind, in the realm of public policy we're self-protecting, self-serving, and self-absorbed. Our hearts may work. But we're also scared of the cost of caring.

There is no need for them to go away' give them some food yourselves

Alice Camille writes:

When we think about doing justice, we often think about giving the poor a bigger piece of the world's pie. That solution works fine, so long as we're working with an ever-expanding pie. But what if the pie is limited? Giving others a larger piece entails taking a smaller piece for ourselves. Are we still willing to work for justice?

Because there are more people and fewer resources each passing year, the pie is actually shrinking. Are we still willing to work for a just redistribution of the world's goods knowing that our piece will get smaller? This is the conversation we don't want to have about justice: that it will cost some of us the lifestyle we've grown accustomed to. We could feed everyone in the world if we dared. But what kind of miracle would it take to get you and me to take less out of the basket?

Reflection Question. To what extent are you and I willing to do with less so that the hungry can be feed? Mother Teresa used to say: *"Live simply so that others may simply live."*

Bringing Home Mom and Dad

Last week's Pastor's column heading included the words *Taking Home Mom and Dad*. If you read my column, you may have wondered what happened to the mom and dad story. Well, I forgot to include it. The following story appeared recently in *Newsweek*. It was written by Anne Kennedy Rickover. I am sure any of you who are dealing with the challenge of aging parents will find this an interesting piece. In caring for her mom and dad, Anne was living the eucharist. She writes:

I hadn't been pregnant in 20 years, but this was planned just as my previous pregnancies had been. For no logical reason, I woke up one day and knew that it was correct; my entire being knew it was precisely the right time. Of course, the clarity was subtly infiltrated with uncertainties and fears as soon as the decision was made.

When I woke up that morning a little more than a year ago, I knew it was time to ask my parents to move closer to me. By closer, I mean 1,300 miles closer—all the way from suburban [Philadelphia](#) to [Lincoln, Neb.](#) The logistics, both geographically and culturally, were overwhelming. The distance between the East Coast and the Midwest had never seemed so vast.

I'm 55 years old. The last time I lived less than 100 miles from my parents, I was 18. But reports from the

East kept telling me they were not able to keep up the house—the house they had moved into when I was 3 months old. Assorted ailments were making their day-to-day life harder to sustain. Where the clarity of my decision came from remains a mystery. I suspect that my parents felt the same. How and why they knew it was time to sell the house and move from their carefully delineated lives was a flash of certainty for them as well.

So I waited for their house to get cleared out and sold. I knew the delivery would be easier than labor. (Thank God for small blessings.) While my parents faced a multitude of decisions, I merely waited, sure that I wanted this change and terrified of what would become of my own life.

At the beginning of this "pregnancy," just as at the beginning of all my pregnancies, I read. When I was pregnant with my children, it was a challenge to narrow down the volumes of advice. Every week of pregnancy and virtually every hour of labor were clearly outlined. This time, however, I looked in vain for books that explained how to move your parents halfway across the country and settle them into a new life. What would the first week be like? What were the progressive stages we would all go through? The necessary information just didn't seem to exist.

So instead, I turned to the Web site of the local agency on aging. In place of Lamaze, a friend who works with the elderly shared her knowledge and experience. I listened to all the stories of my friends who have aging parents nearby, just as I had eagerly questioned all my friends who had already started families. Everyone seemed to be stumbling along without any real answers.

Just as we'd picked a pediatrician, there were doctors to be found and services to be located. Instead of shopping for furniture for a nursery, I had to find my parents an apartment. My babies, now 23 and 21 years old, hadn't given any prior input into their living arrangements, and my parents also put the decision into my hands. "Find us a place. You'll do fine." Where would they shop? Where would my mother make her weekly hair appointment? Where would they find the friends and social support they would?

I didn't want to have any illusions. All the old mixed feelings about my parents came back. I reminded myself that we're different people now. They're no longer the powerful forces I once perceived as holding me back from the life I desperately wanted to start. They're people who now depend, to a large extent, on me. I'm running the

show—except, of course, I'm not. They're my parents and that doesn't change.

But what is possibly the most difficult outcome looms. Just as children move away, my parents are going to die. When my children were young, lots of vague passages of [Khalil Gibran](#) floated around my head; we were all free agents, the children would leave and I would be a model of non-attachment, continuing with my life, joyfully releasing them to their own journeys. Nothing prepared me for the pain that went along with this happy release.

Perhaps if my parents still lived 1,300 miles away, I'd feel the pain of separation less when they eventually leave. But they are now part and parcel of my everyday life and the huge gap they will leave will be more overwhelming than it would be otherwise.

But I survived my children's entries into my everyday world and their exit into their own lives, now mysterious and private. I came through my parents' entry and will get through their eventual leaving. I'll be shown again the foolishness of my conceits, the infinitely greater sweetness and richness of life, the poignant beginning and ending of yet another cycle.

Masonry Unmasked

I saw the author of the above named book interviewed on EWTN. If anyone thinks the Free Mason organization is a harmless organization, they ought to read this book

Have a blessed week,

