



## Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 31, 2011 A

### STORIES AND REFLECTIONS ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

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 which shows that it was regarded as very important 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.

The following two stories tell us about the power of a community working together to solve big problems in our world. The first story, *The Miraculous Stone Soup*, is from Flor McCarthy's book *Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies*.

*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 neighbor. Soon all the neighbors 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 neighbors 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.*

[Permission granted by Dominican Publications, [www.dominicanpublication.com](http://www.dominicanpublication.com).]

### Sandbagged

The following piece is by Jay Cormier.

*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.”

Cormier adds: *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.*

[Used with permission from Jay Cormier, Copyright 2010 by Connections/MediaWorks. All rights reserved]

### **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 our-selves. 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 fed? Mother Teresa used to say: “*Live simply so that others may simply live.*”

**Thank you, Fr. Charles,** for your presence this past month. God willing, I will see you next weekend.

### **Next Sunday is Food Pantry Sunday**

I am most grateful to all of you who bring food items for our Food Pantry at the beginning of each month. The BEST way to say “Thank you, Lord” for the food on my table is to share a portion of it with those who are not so blessed. Jesus will say to us on Judgment Day, “Come ... for I was hungry and you gave me to eat.”

Have a blessed week,

*Le Paron*