

GOD DOES NOT WASTE!

Today's Text: Jn 6: 1- 14

Extracts:

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" ...Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." ...So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks *He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they ... filled twelve baskets with the fragments ... left over by those who had eaten [Jn 6: 5-13]*

Bridget and Angelo Pericola, a New Jersey (USA) couple, had been married for 55 years.¹ On Monday, November 9, 2009, soon after marking that event, Bridget left her wedding ring in a cup. The following day, while leaving home for work, her husband threw the cup out with the garbage. When she could not find her wedding ring, she phoned her husband. He quickly contacted the Parsippany (their home town) Sanitation Supervisor who suggested that he should come to the local central dump. Later, the supervisor and two sanitation workers dug through ten tons of trash until they found the garbage that Angelo had thrown away. Inside it was the missing wedding ring!

To Angelo, that cup (possibly one of the paper cups used during their 55th wedding anniversary party) was waste; something no longer required. However, it contained his wife's treasure, her wedding ring. That is an eye opener for us. Is it not possible that what we trash as waste may actually be wealth? How many of God's blessings have we wasted without realizing it? In this week's Bible story, Jesus asked His disciples to gather up the fragments of loaves and fish after He had miraculously fed five thousand men. They got twelve baskets. Why did Jesus insist that the leftover be not wasted? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Story based on "Wedding ring found amid 10 tons of trash," http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33853287/ns/us_news-wonderful_world/?GT1=43001 ; Wed., Nov. 11, 2009

1. Background: Jesus orders leftover to be gathered after feeding 5,000 men

In most city trash dumps around the world, we see human and other scavengers tearing up leftover bags and looking for something. For example, some homeless and hungry people are looking for food to eat. Some entrepreneurs are looking for discarded rubber, paper or plastic products that they can recycle for money. Some criminals also go there to steal from other scavengers! Clearly, everything that people throw away is not waste after all!

In this week's Bible story [**Jn 6: 1-14**], a great multitude of people milled around Jesus after He had crossed over the Sea of Galilee because "they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased" [**vv. 1- 2**]. Even when He went up on the mountain with His disciples, they waited for Him. But, as soon as He came down, they rushed toward Him. Let us take the story from there:

a) *The people had a need*

As Jesus looked at the people coming toward Him, He perceived that they were hungry, having followed Him for some days. The day was already far spent and they were in a deserted place [**Mk 6: 35**]. When we go to church or attend a revival service, we are looking for something. Some of us, at least, are looking to fill a felt need. Some of us may go there simply to thank God for what he has done or promised. However, when we get there, things may not go as we have planned because we are not in control of the programme. We may wind up staying longer than expected. We may not have taken a snack pack with us and the place may be far away from where we can buy food. So, in addition to what originally brought us to that place, hunger becomes a new need. That was the situation that people in that great multitude milling around Jesus faced.

Jesus zeroed in on the people's basic need at that time for He said to Philip, one of His disciples, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" [**Jn 6: 5**]. ***A need is what you require to survive.*** At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His listeners, "Your Father knows the things you have *need* of before you ask Him" [**Matt. 6: 8**]. He added, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" [**v. 25**]. Writing to the Philippians, Paul said, "My God shall supply all your *need* according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" [**Phil. 4: 19**]. Therefore, ***when we ask for what is beyond our need, it is called a want, driven by greed!***

b) *But they had no means to meet it*

In response to the Lord's question ["Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"], Philip said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not

sufficient for them, that every one of them may have *a little*” [Jn 6: 7]. There were five thousand men there, besides women and children [Matt. 14: 21]. In that gathering, there were likely to be as many women and children as men. Therefore, we are looking at more than ten thousand hungry persons in that multitude. A denarius was an ordinary day’s wage for a labourer in those days [Matt. 20: 2]. So, to be able to buy food for those men, women and children, so that they could have a little each, you would need close to an average labourer’s annual wage! How many people do you think could afford that?

One of the Lord’s disciples, Andrew (Simon Peter’s brother) told Jesus that there was a “lad” there that had five barley loaves and two fish and he added, “But what are they among so many?” [Jn 6: 8]. A lad is a youngster. The lad in the story could either have been a street hawker (trying to make a quick buck!) or that was his lunch pack! Either way, what he had would not be enough even for himself over a few days, not to talk of thousands of others.

We can NEVER have enough to meet our needs, not to talk of our wants that are driven by greed and inordinate ambition. Even when we kill or steal to satisfy our wants, we are still in short supply! That was why Paul warned young Timothy, “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out ... those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” [1 Tim. 6: 7-9].

c) *Jesus could and did!*

Of course, Jesus knew what He was going to do. He merely asked Philip to test him; to let him know that of ourselves, we can do nothing or very little, but with God, all things are possible. So, after Andrew had told Him that a young man in the multitude had five loaves and two fish, Jesus commanded the disciples to make the people sit down. In Mark’s version of the story, the people sat in small groups “in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties” [Mk 6: 39-40]. Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks [to His heavenly Father] and gave them to His disciples to distribute among the people. In like manner, He blessed the fish. *The people ate “as much as they wanted” until “they were filled”* [Jn 6: 11-12].

You can be sure that some gourmards and gluttons among them ate until they almost burst. How some people love free things! On that day, they met their match. They had no regret coming to Jesus because He provided more food than the people could consume. He has promised those who labour and are heavy-laden to come to Him and He will give them rest [Matt. 11: 28-30].

d) *But how about the leftovers?*

After the people had eaten to their fill, Jesus said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, ***so that nothing is lost.***” They gathered them and filled twelve baskets [**Jn 6: 12-13**]. The dictionary definition of fragments is trash, garbage or waste. After over five thousand people had eaten “as much as they wanted,” can you imagine what those fragments of loaves and fish looked like? Real trash, fit only for the refuse dump. Yet, Jesus said that they should be gathered up so that NOTHING be lost!

That is a remarkable statement. As humans, we may worry only about self or a small group of those who depend on us for their livelihood. On the other hand, since the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein [**Ps. 24: 1**], God has much more to take care of. For example, He has over six billion human beings on earth to feed or clothe. The birds of the air neither sow nor reap but He feeds them [**Matt. 6: 26**]. He is the Father of the fatherless [**Ps. 68: 5**] and the husband of widows [**Is. 54: 5**]. Therefore, He cannot afford to waste. Since we are made in His image and likeness [**Gen. 1: 27**], don’t you think that we should do as He does in the matter of waste?

We learn from that story that ***God is interested not only in how we use our blessings for ourselves but what we do with the rest.*** Much more, He does not want anything to be lost. For example, when God fed the children of Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven, He commanded that ‘every man [should] gather it according to each one’s ***need.***’ When they measured what each person collected, “he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need” [**Ex. 16: 16-18**]. Do you know how God handled the leftover? When the sun became hot, the leftover simply melted! But, as we had seen earlier, human conduct is driven more by greed than need. Even when Moses warned the children of Israel not to leave any of the manna they had collected till morning, “some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank” [**vv. 20-21**]! So, what have you been doing with the waste from your blessings?

2. How to effectively manage your leftover

We shall define “leftover” as what you no longer use or need. In the story above, twelve baskets were gathered of the leftover loaves and fish so that nothing was lost. That suggests that Jesus gave them away to other needy people. For example, the disciples were also hungry and we are not told that they brought their own food. The lad that gave Jesus his five loaves and two fish could also have received some of the baskets. That would be a good return on his investments! If you were given the task of disposing those twelve baskets, what would you do? Here are some guidelines on how you can effectively manage the leftover (or waste) from the unmerited blessings that God has given you in life:

a) *Know God's purpose for your blessing*

Jesus provided only one meal for the multitude so that they would have enough energy to return home. Rather than waste what was left of the food, He asked that it be gathered, presumably, for others who were also hungry. In like manner, you must make sure that you know why God has blessed you with time or space or things. With respect to wealth, for example, it is God that gives us power to get wealth for His own purpose (s). For instance, to the children of Israel, God used wealth “to establish His covenant which He swore to [their] fathers” **[Deut. 8: 17-19]**. Solomon asked for wisdom to be able judge the people of Israel over whom God had made him king and to “discern between good and evil” **[1 Kgs 3: 9]**.

Why has God made you so beautiful or so brilliant or given you a good voice? Why are you so rich? Why do you have so much time or excess capacity on your hands? Why has God given you such a wonderful spouse or an enviable job? Why are your children so successful in their chosen professions? Why have you never been hospitalized since birth and you still look strong in your seventies? Have you bothered to find out why God has showered you with such blessings? Unless you do so, you may not appreciate what you have for in the words of Jesus, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet” **[Matt. 7: 6]**!

b) *Determine what you need, not what you want!*

Once you know why God has given you what you have, the next thing is to quickly determine what you need, not what you want. For example, do you need the fleet of cars in your garage or are you trying to impress those you compare yourself with in society? You can only sleep on one bed in one room at a time. So, why do you have such a huge mansion, even when all your children have married and moved out?

Remember the story of the Rich Fool. His ground yielded plentifully and he had no more room to store his produce. What did he do? He planned to pull down his present barn and expand it. Thereafter, he planned to lay up his goods for so many years ahead, take his ease, eat, drink and be merry. God called him a fool because he was greedy and self-centred and not rich toward God **[Lk 12: 16-21]**. ***You may say, “How can I know what I need?” It is quite simple. If you cannot sleep even when you have material abundance, you have exceeded your need.***

c) *Plan what to do with the excess or leftover*

It may depend on whether your leftover is durable or perishable. If it is perishable, like foods, some people simply throw it into the trash can or bag for ultimate disposal into designated dump sites. Some people give it to the needy that they can reach. But most of us are more reluctant with durables, such as handbags and shoes (women) and cars (men). That is why your wardrobes or garages are littered with items that you have not used for years! Cash is one durable that most of us never give up or away. Instead, we pile them up in fat bank accounts or reliable investments. Where we do charity at all, it is likely to be for tax purposes. Even where we pay tithes on them, we insist on receipts for tax purposes! The love of money is the root of all evil that can make us stray from true faith in God [1 Tim. 6: 10].

From the forgoing, *we can conclude that those who seek first the kingdom of God and all His righteousness make it easier for God to add earthly blessings [Matt. 6: 33] that meet their needs when they give away their leftovers in accordance with God's plan*. Therefore, you can imitate the example of the four beggars who had been driven by hunger into the abandoned camp of the fleeing Syrians on the day that God miraculously brought abundant food to Israel as prophesied by Elisha. The lepers went into one tent, ate and drank and carried away silver, gold and clothing which they went to hide. They said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household." For sharing their leftover with others, the lepers gained social acceptance; the whole kingdom of Israel was blessed and inflation dropped dramatically overnight [1 Kgs 7: 1-20]. That is *what you will enjoy if you use your leftover to bless others. It is a lending to the Lord and He will repay you [Prov. 19: 17]*.

3. Conclusion: Waste not, want not!

In addition to wisdom and understanding, God granted Solomon riches and honour, such that there was no other king of his day like him [1 Kgs 3: 12-13]. He became so rich that silver was as common in Jerusalem as ordinary stones [1 Kgs 10: 27]. But what did he do with his excess wealth? He married over 700 wives and 300 concubines who turned his heart away from God [1 Kgs 11: 1-4]. The wisest king died as a fool!

Jesus is saying to you this moment, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost" [Jn 6: 12]. By His death on the cross, He has given you free access to His kingdom. It may be free to you but it was a high price for Him. Are you going to waste it on the cares of this world? So, gather up the fragments of your faith in Him, that nothing be lost. Don't waste it or else you will want forever!