

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

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As with most of you I would think, we always went to see the fireworks on the fourth of July. I can say with certainty most if not all children had wonder on their faces throughout the display. Having been to Disney World's Epcot many times as an adult and being present at the evening fireworks display, they were still enjoyable, but I ask myself if there was still the magic or the wonder I once felt in me? Was I falling into boredom that comes from too much familiarity? When I think back to all the firework displays I have seen, there is one that epitomizes wonder for me. We were along the Ohio River in Pennsylvania and the fireworks were launched from the river which was a couple of hundred feet below us. The explosions happened almost in front of us as we stood on the palisade. It was as if we were standing in the middle of the display and all the noise and colors could not help but draw our wonder. What about miracles in our lives? Do we have the same boredom?

Over the years, as many of you probably have as well, heard all the enlightened rationalization and debunking of "miracles". We have innumerable scientific reasons that the miracles of the Bible were all just ordinary events that anyone including you and I could do anytime we wanted. I hope we still at least laugh at such absurdity. But again I asked myself if this lack of wonder and enthusiasm is just a reaction to boredom and familiarity with the stories. My grandfather once told me the worst part of getting old was losing one's friends. I am reaching the age where I understand him rather well. I have seen many friends die of one disease or another, but every once in a while there is a cure or recovery. Even here I find most participants do not see the cure as anything special. In fact most see it as the way things are suppose to be. There is a young fellow in our fire department, who just had his second kidney transplant. The first was when he was just an infant and it had recently failed. He is up and about in only two months and is traveling the world with his family. I don't know about the medical team or his family, friends, or colleagues, but I stand in great wonder in that not so simple cure which should last him for another 20 years at least. I concluded that the difference is how our hearts view wondrous events. This is where we acknowledge the goodness of the Lord – or not. This is where we acknowledge He interacts in our best interests in our reality – or not. Were most of these wondrous events or miracles done at the hand of a human person? Of course, but then all of us can say "yes" to the Lord so he can act through us any time He asks us.

Today's readings can invoke boredom or ennui in us and we would miss the wonder in the events. We could analyze them and declare any one of us could do the same and we would be partially right. We would be right if we acknowledge we were doing any one of these miracles only by the power of the Father. But what is going on with the miracle of feeding the thousands and in all miracles? Simply understood, all Christ's miracles announce the Kingdom of God. But don't miss the point, they can only be done or seen as works of mercy. Unlike fireworks, miracles are not done to amuse us. They are done for the good of the kingdom of God. If we are witness to one, then witness. If we are performers of miracles, then perform them. I know of a Catholic surgeon who had performed over 25,000 successful cardiac operations. There is truly "wonder" in that! And he did perform and now that he is retired, he witnesses.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear the comfort and promise of miracles. We also get an idea why miracles have occurred in human existence. We are to have the necessities to witness and live lives of joy – joy of being chosen – joy of acknowledging the goodness of the Lord. After at the time of Isaiah, the Jewish people were under attack by a superior nation who was hauling them off to foreign lands. All they needed to do was to remain faithful to the Lord and witness to it loudly to all who would listen. But as with us, they were frightened and looked inward instead of to the Lord for comfort. Their greatest opportunity to spread the faith became only a loud wailing. Yes they had food and work and homes and freedom from war, but just because it was not as they wanted, and the ever present effects of original sin, they missed the wonder of being alive and in fact in the wonder of just having the necessities of life, the wonder of witnessing in a new place and new time. Psalm 145 continues the theme that we lose wonder because we don't like the package it is wrapped in. We don't want to be humbled, we don't want to ask, we don't want to take our place in the

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queue. We want the best and we want it now and on our terms. So, again wisdom tells us, we need to have a receptive humble heart to see the wonder in what we have been given – namely the generosity of the Lord. On Friday of the fifteenth Week of Ordinary Time (July 18<sup>th</sup>) the reading from Isaiah 38 has Isaiah telling King Hezekiah to put his house in order because he was mortally ill. Hezekiah immediately prayed that he be cured. Hezekiah was indeed cured and in fact was promised 15 more years. But the Lord was not finished for the trust Hezekiah placed in the Father. The Lord would be a shield to Israel from their enemies as well. Was Hezekiah arrogant before the Lord after the promises or disappointed in only 15 years? No he was humble and allowed Isaiah to work the miracle cure promised. He also remained humble and asked Isaiah when he was to go to the Temple. Isaiah says the Lord is not finished with miracles but go when the Lord makes the sun's shadow move back ten steps. There is definitely "wonder" here because the Lord's servant was humble and willing to say "yes" to the Lord's will. One thing to note, is the fact that Hezekiah lived a life of fidelity to the one true God. This is not a conversion story, but rather a story of a believer continuing to believe even when all of science says there is no chance for him. So it would seem Isaiah again and again says we need to have humility and trust to open our hearts to the wonder and generosity of the Lord, even if we do not get it exactly the way we want. Every time I hear this letter of Paul to the Romans, I always wait for the other shoe to drop. I always am expecting the answer of what will separate us from all the goodness of the Lord. I guess that is why St Paul wrote it the way he did. It is time to stir up our wonder and answer it ourselves. The "no" to accepting the Lord's will is the only thing that will separate us from the goodness and generosity of the Lord. The bitterness of not having it in the shape and form and package we want, is the "no", is the divider, is the separator.

Finally in today's Gospel from Matthew we hear of the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish specifically for the well being of the crowd who wanted so much to be with Jesus and be enlightened, be gifted, be comforted in their lives by the Father. They made the effort and followed their hearts even when Jesus wanted to be alone, even when they were in an impossible situation of being hungry. They pursued Him and found Him and were loved by Him. Their sick were cured, their physical and spiritual selves were fed that day because they believed and acted from faith. The big and little miracles were in fact the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy of the how rich and good the kingdom will be. It is almost like an engraved invitation. We are all invited to the kingdom and also invited to participate in bringing the kingdom to our place and our time just by believing and witnessing to the wonder of that kingdom – to the wonder and generosity of the Lord. They, as we, are fed first by bread by the Eucharist and then asked to spread that wonder to all we meet. There are many works we are fed to do, but it seems to me that when we experience the wonder of the Lord's generosity we need to not only address the physical needs as in the Corporal Works of Mercy (Feed the hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked, Shelter the homeless, Visit the sick, Visit the imprisoned, and Bury the dead) but also, the spiritual needs with the Spiritual Works of Mercy (Admonish the sinner, Instruct the ignorant, Counsel the doubtful, Comfort the sorrowful, Bear wrongs patiently, Forgive all injuries, and Pray for the living and the dead).

So I would think the lessons of today's readings are, first we need to allow our hearts to feel wonder. Then share the wonder with all around us. In my life recently there was a curious and somewhat disorienting appointment with a doctor who said the latest test could not find the disease that he had diagnosed 4 months prior. I was to come back in January because "these things just don't happen", he said. So I begin to understand miracles and the wonder they engender. So too I need to share the wonder of the generosity of our Lord. So too, I am to be like Hezekiah and be humble before the Lord. That day a couple of thousand years ago, those who were fed from just a few loaves and a couple of fish were given their miracle that would draw the wonder of the Lord's love and generosity into their hearts. They and we, as believers, need to be open to the miracles that we witness no matter how they are delivered. Then we need to let the wonder energize our faith so we can be fed to witness, to share that faith through works of mercy with all who will hear and accept.