

## Sunday Thought

25th July 2021 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Readings

2 Samuel 11: 1 - 15

Psalm 14

Ephesians 3: 14 - 21

Mark 6: 1 - 21

### All's Fair and Share ...



A poem by John Lyly in the sixteenth century gave us the proverbial statement '*All's fair in love and war.*' More popularly it has come to mean – '*it's all right to abandon the rules in a crisis*' That seems to have been the attitude of some throughout the present pandemic. It was certainly true of king David in the story which begins in today's Old Testament reading. It may have been strategically good

practice, but there is something disturbingly casual about the way the story opens – *It's springtime! Let's make war and go with our armies to slaughter the Ammonites!* While the army is away David has an affair with beautiful Bathsheba, wife of an army officer called Uriah, which results in her pregnancy. David wishes to marry Bathsheba and clears the way by contriving the death of Uriah in battle. Next week's reading (or read on now) will show how even a chosen king cannot escape God's judgement on rule- breakers or benders. There is justice.

The Gospel reading today is concerned with a different facet of justice – hungry people! The crowds which followed Jesus were not necessarily hungry from poverty, although it could have been so. All across the world hunger is a very real problem today and reaches us too with increased local demands for food banks. This year's figures reveal there are over eight hundred million hungry people in the world – that's one in ten of our planet's population! Climate, war, poverty are all causes affecting over 100 different countries from Afghanistan to Yemen. United Nations actions had improved the situation in recent years but the pandemic has been a real set-back to their efforts. Estimates tell of 25,000 people (10,000 of them children) dying from hunger related causes every DAY! The gospel reading is about one particular meal arranged to help more than five thousand hungry people on just one occasion, but it has much to say about the injustice of a hungry world in which the rules are too often abandoned to war and greed.

Still seeking respite with his disciples, Jesus had crossed to the east side of lake Galilee, opposite Tiberius, the new city Herod Antipas had built on the west bank. After more sessions of teaching and healing Jesus was concerned for the welfare of the crowd – and the faith of his disciples. John suggests Jesus may have wanted to turn the occasion into a sort of Passover meal. The Master asked Philip, who

was from those parts, *'Where can we get food for them all?'* Philip was a businessman and not impressed by the challenge. *'It would take eight months average wages to feed all these,'* he replied. I can imagine other comments while they sat the people down in some sort of order. *'Why didn't they come prepared?'* *'It won't hurt them to miss a meal.'* *'They could have brought a picnic!'* *'They didn't have to bring the whole family!'* It is Andrew who latches on to the sound of picnic. *'There's a lad here with a picnic. It's far more than he needs but not enough for all!'* Andrew implies that there will probably be more people there in the same position. I would not wish to cast any doubt on Jesus and his miracles. I am sure he was quite able to turn a few scraps into a feast by means known only to God, but a situation had been created which was precisely what he was tempted with in the desert at the start of his ministry *'Turn stones into bread and the whole world will follow you,'* the devil assured him. Already, this crowd were talking about making him king! However, if Jesus was able to get five thousand people to share his compassion and their food? Now that IS a miracle!

*'All's fair and share'* is a basic principle of justice in the Kingdom of God. It is how Christians live. I am assured there is sufficient food on our planet for everyone – and that's not counting the waste! We have to live on the opposite side to excessive profit, waste and *'me first'*. I hear Jesus say, as Matthew records in his account of this event, *'You feed them'.* and I know the Christian response it to pray, to give, to be concerned about waste and conservation. That's how we share in the feeding miracle today.

This is a way of life for members of God's Kingdom. Jesus has called us to be *Fair and Share people*. Paul's prayer in the reading from Ephesians explains how. The Kingdom of God, Jesus said, is only 'out there' because it is 'in you'. It begins with the Spirit of God in each one of us, when we are inwardly changed, to be rooted and growing in God's love. Filled with the love of God we become part of that *Fair and Share* life to which Jesus calls us. I am glad that someone once noticed me and said, *'Here's a lad who has something to offer!'*

#### A Prayer (based on Psalm 14)

Lord, our God,  
there are so many roads to faith in you:  
How sad when people say there is no road –  
no way to you –  
no YOU!  
especially when you have made a road to us  
at such cost, through Jesus.  
Keep me walking humbly with him,  
and let me show the way for others.

