

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 30, 2006

Perhaps it is my innate cynicism which made me appreciate a Dilbert comic strip in which Dilbert is determined to organize an aerobics class for engineers, and Dogbert tells him that it will never work. The engineers in Scott Adam's cartoon world, of course, are not only uncoordinated failures, but knock each other out in their attempt at coordinated exercise. And Dilbert, in the end, must acknowledge that "the cynics were right." To which Dogbert adds, "we usually are." And yes, we usually are. Our mantra is "go ahead, but I don't see how it's going to work." What we see is how it's not going to work: we see the flaw in the design, how A, which is supposed to lead to B, actually leads to C. In today's Gospel passage, Andrew takes the role of the cynic. Jesus tells the disciples to feed all the people, and immediately they see how it's just not possible: many, many people, thousands of people; little food on hand, and no resources with which to procure any more. Andrew, upon seeing what they do have to work with—five loaves and two fish—even says, what good are these for so many? They would be very good for a family, or a small group; but for this large crowd, and achieving the end of feeding them all, they appear to be virtually worthless.

The multiplication of the loaves and the fish is a story which has been subject to more than its share of what I find to be bizarre interpretations; strange interpretations which really reek of cynicism, because they try to discount Jesus' power and what he actually did with this miracle, as well as discounting what the meaning of the miracle actually is. Some purport that he was able to literally feed all of the people, with a little, itty-bitty, teeny-tiny piece of bread and of fish; the miracle was, that somehow that little tiny molecule of food satisfied them, and had the same effect on them as did a great big meal. It was 5,000 people for crying out loud; they might have each gotten a good whiff of an atom. Popular among some scholars today is the "miracle of sharing" motif, in which many, many people actually had fish and bread, and Jesus miraculously was able to get them to share. Instead of concealed weapons, the people had concealed bread and concealed aquatic life. But the story as related in the Gospels doesn't even hint at these as possible solutions to the miracle, and I use the word "solution" very purposely, because they both indicate a resistance to the miracle: there must be, must be some explanation, some rational, natural, logical explanation as to how this happened. As you can see, the cynics have issues with Jesus' power over the created order, and with Jesus' power to perform miracles; the best miracle they want to attribute to him is the power of persuasion. But the Church has always recognized by both its details and its placement that the story is essentially Eucharistic, not that it's a Eucharistic celebration, but it lays the groundwork for the Eucharistic—what the Eucharist means, and how it is possible. It's not the bread which gives the miracle its Eucharistic overtones, but the multiplication of the bread. He multiplied what was there: made it available to more than one person at a time, transcended the natural laws of time and space and gave the people, for a moment, a glimpse of the timeless and space-less, the eternal and the infinite. At Jesus'

command, these elements became subject to the supernatural laws of God, no longer limited as they are here, in this world, for us.

So this time, the cynics, including Andrew, were wrong. What good are these for so many? What good indeed; not only fed them, but would eventually be used to instruct them on the nature of the Eucharist. But let us not fault Andrew too much; I can certainly see myself as having wondered what good they could have done. It is the unimaginative mind which can't fathom such possibilities, but really, who would have fathomed this? We look for solutions all the time in our little boxes wherein lie our knowledge and experiences, and even when trying to "think outside the box," we usually only go to a slightly larger box. One of the things this miracle teaches us is that God does things which we just simply couldn't imagine, things that man would not come up with on his own. The Church teaches us that the Eucharist is such a miracle; it really makes no sense, beyond the fact that it is revealed; why would man come up with the notion that what looks like bread and wine is, in fact, the Body and Blood of Christ? Other than it being revealed, who could have imagined Jesus being in more than one place at once; and yet he is. He's in this tabernacle right behind me, as he is right now in all the tabernacles of all the Catholic churches throughout the world, and as he is also in heaven, at the Father's right hand. Who could have dreamt up that he would give himself to us totally in each reception of Holy Communion, that we receive not a part or portion of his Body, but Jesus himself, whole and entire, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in so much as a particle of the host or in a drop of his Precious Blood? The Church's teaching on this is way beyond being outside the box; this is outside man's grasp and imagination, a further sign that it is truly of God.

Andrew voiced out loud his concerns that what little they found to offer could be of any great effect; Elisha did the same thing in the reading from the second book of Kings, when he, too, was ordered to feed very many with very little. And we may be tempted too sometimes to wonder what our seemingly small, meager contributions to the Mystical Body can actually make; what difference does my difference really have on others? Why should I volunteer my time, why should I toss a check into the collection basket? The Church can't operate just on what I give anyway; and even if I offer my time to God, well, there's so much more to be done than I can ever accomplish; so what difference does it make? There's a germ of truth there, but it's flawed in its cynicism and is the fruit of the unimaginative mindset. Sure, no one voice makes a choir, yet if every voice decided not to sing, the choir would never be. No one person can teach all of our CCD students; yet if each person decides not to teach, learning would be put on hold. Why serve, why usher, why clean, why pray, when my tiny contribution doesn't really make that big of a difference? But think of the difference which was made a few weeks ago when a couple of guys broke into one of our churches, not knowing that an adorer was there. I do nocturnal adoration, and I can see how easy it would be to think to yourself, why am I up in the middle of the night, why not just pray during the day when I'm awake anyway? But what a difference that adorer

made by being there at 2:00 a.m., to call the police that night; and who knows how many prayers have been answered because they were made in the midst of the sacrifice which comes from giving up sleep to go pray before our Lord? We don't always get to see the full effects of our actions, because God uses them in his way, in his time.

It's something that even we cynics have to overcome in order to fully mature in our Christian faith. When we place our time, our resources, all of our efforts in God's hands, we don't have to ask "what good will this do?" Like the loaves and the fish, like the Body and Blood of Christ, God multiplies our efforts in ways that we cannot imagine and certainly not predict. Never think that what you have to offer to the Church can't really make a difference; God can use us in ways that never occurred to us, in ways that right now we may not even be able to imagine. And remember that when we receive his greatest miracle of the Eucharist in Holy Communion, the good he does in us and the good he does through us is multiplied—because he has both the power and the will to do it. Think about taking that hour of adoration; think about teaching that CCD class. Think about joining, think about learning, and think about serving and sharing your goods with God. And when you do, don't say "I don't see what difference it's going to make." God sees the difference it makes; God sees what good all of our actions can do. He will make great things happen in us and through us—if, like Andrew and Elisha in today's readings, we abandon what is in our possession to him, and let him work his miracles in ways that we can't begin to imagine.

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