July 29, 2018
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time – “So That Nothing Will Be Wasted”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1 2 Kings 4:42-44
A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the firstfruits, and fresh grain in the ear. Elisha said, “Give it to the people to eat.” But his servant objected, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” Elisha insisted, “Give it to the people to eat.” “For thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and there shall be some left over.’” And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

Reading 2 Ephesians 4:1-6
Brothers and sisters: I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Gospel John 6:1-15
Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people recline.” Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted.” So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.” Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

HOMILY
Water into wine, the feeding of the 5000, the Last Supper, cooking the fish on the charcoal fire after the Resurrection – many stories in the Gospels focus on our physical need for food. We need food, in order to live. And, don’t forget the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, with stories like Elisha in our first reading, the manna in the desert for the Israelites, and Elijah’s visit to the widow who had only a handful of flour. And, who can forget the apple in the Garden of Eden. Not only do we have a physical need to eat, but we enjoy it – and I, for one, may enjoy it a little too much at times. 😊

Growing up as a teen downstate, I spent many weeknights and most weekends helping out my parents who were caterers – helping to cook for and serve 200-300 people was a common occurrence for my siblings and me. So, after Barb and I married, whenever more than a few people came over, Barb would look at me and say, “You’re cooking.”

This liturgical year, we have been hearing from Mark’s Gospel. Last Sunday, Mark noted that the crowds were gathering around Jesus and His disciples because they were curious, they wanted to see more
signs, more miracles, and they wanted to know more about this man – was He the Prophet they had been expecting? Mark’s Gospel account shows Jesus feeding the crowd of 5000, and then continues on to other events in Jesus’ life. But, the Church saw this as a great opportunity to move over to John’s account of the feeding of the crowd. John’s account, which shows that this was much more than just another of Jesus’ miracles, much more than a sign of God’s presence among His people. John’s account leads to Jesus discussing how the manna that God supplied to the Israelites in the desert kept them physically alive during that journey, but Jesus then declares that He is the true bread from Heaven, the bread of eternal life. We will be hearing more on this over the next four weeks before returning to Mark in September.

John’s account also provides a bit more detail of the event. After the crowd had eaten, Jesus said, “Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted.” Just about 5 years ago, Pope Francis first suggested that this feeding of the crowd, this multiplication of the loaves and fishes and the subsequent concern about wasting nothing, might cause us to think further about caring for God’s physical creation – the world around us – as well as God’s human creation – ourselves and others around us. Since that first suggestion, made during one of his first General Audiences, the Pope has continued to encourage the modern-day disciples of Christ – all of us – at numerous times and in numerous writings, including his encyclical Laudato Si, to embrace a “culture of solidarity and encounter” and reject the “throwaway culture of waste.” So, not only are we challenged to care for the environment and the world around us, but also challenged to care for each other materially … and spiritually. Let’s take a brief look at some opportunities in each of these, while also noting how they can interact with each other.

So that nothing will be wasted – God’s physical creation and our environment: the numbers can be staggering. Starbucks made recent headlines about eliminating plastic straws to become more environmentally responsible – they estimate a billion of these are used each year in its stores. So they are making a step in the right direction. … But, how about electronic waste – there are now more cell phones than people in the world. And even though 70% of cell phones are recyclable, only a fraction gets recycled – guess where the rest eventually go. And how many computer monitors, televisions and other used electronics do you see at the curb instead of the recycling center? … Let’s look at fresh water. Most of us in America are very blessed to have plentiful, clean drinking water, and we use more per person than anywhere else in the world. The rest of the world – not so plentiful. Our granddaughter just returned from a mission trip to Haiti and she can attest to that, as I’m sure Fr. Rick Frechette, a name from Haiti very familiar to St. Louis parishioners, can also. Yet much of the water in an average American household is wasted.

So that nothing will be wasted – attending to the material needs of each other in God’s human creation. A recent news article noted that people around the world are now living longer, more children are attending school and basic social care is reaching more people, so that the overall development and welfare of the world population has actually improved over the past 25 years. That is truly wonderful news! But, even with that progress, there are still 800 million people around the world, about 1 in 9, that still go to bed hungry at night. And yet, we Americans trash almost 40% of our edible food, about 400 pounds of food per person per year trashed … 400 pounds per person! The environmental impact of this is likewise amazing – according to some estimates, the production and distribution of food in the U.S. gobbles up 10% of the total energy budget, 50% of land use and up to 80% of all freshwater used. And we often hear about the damaging effects of too much carbon dioxide, yet food waste in landfills generates methane gas which is 25 times more damaging to the environment than CO2. One other food statistic – the average food serving in restaurants and fast food chains has more than doubled in the past
50 years – so, if we don’t eat our serving, guess where it goes. And if we do eat it, well … how about obesity in America?

Attending to the material needs of each other, we are called to respect the lives of others, to see the value of each and every human being, to see the face of Christ in everyone. To see the face of Christ in the destitute, the extreme poor, the addict, the prisoner, the migrant, the legal and the illegal immigrant, the severely disabled, the invalid senior citizen, the hospice patient, and the unborn, may put us outside of our comfort zone, but we are challenged to do just that, and to respond accordingly, to help in some way. We are challenged to have a true respect for life – not a watered-down position based on the illusion or convenience of a false mercy.

So that nothing will be wasted – in order to reject the overall culture of waste and more fully embrace a culture of solidarity and encounter, we also need to tend to the spiritual care of each other, so that our souls and the souls of others will not be lost, will not be wasted. Certainly, this can correspond with material care in some ways, but it goes beyond that, much beyond that. Spiritual care also entails the teaching and the defense of our faith – the fullness of our faith – what has been handed down directly from Christ through His Apostles and what the Church has taught over the years and continues to teach. During this past week, the Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, Blessed Pope Paul VI’s encyclical which steadfastly reaffirmed the teachings of the Catholic Church on the unitive and procreative dimensions of married love. The encyclical – arguably the most talked about of all time – noted the now prophetic voice of Paul VI’s warning if the contraceptive pill saw widespread use, notably:

- An increase in marital infidelity and the general lowering of morality
- Lost respect for women and treating women as objects – porn is the #1 use of the internet
- Abuse of power by public authorities – Governments would begin to use contraception and encourage it, even demand it like China did, on their populations
- People would begin thinking they have total, unlimited dominion over their bodies – becoming their own higher authority on human creation

There is a lot here to think about, but it can all be summarized by looking towards a culture of solidarity and encounter, a culture of respecting our planet, respecting ourselves, and respecting the lives of each and every person on our planet. We all need to do our homework because each of us is personally responsible for the things we use, and waste, and the way we treat, and respect, each other. For example, some common-sense environmental actions include:

- Don’t throw electronics in the trash – recycle, recycle, recycle
- Don’t toss old medicines or prescriptions – towns have occasional collection times (for example, the Fairport police station has a collection box)
- Conserve water – fix leaky faucets, shut water off while brushing your teeth
- Watch what you buy, watch especially what, and how much, you eat

Besides the above, consider stepping it up a notch and download and read the encyclicals mentioned here.

Many of us have our pet projects, areas where we do take personal responsibility, but somehow fail to find common ground with the others. Our society has become so polarized, we can feel forced to take sides and that makes it more challenging to see the commonality in all of these, but that is what we, as modern-day disciples of Christ, are called to do, and to help others along the way. If it all seems too overwhelming, remember to start small and to offer what we have to give in Christ’s hands, just like the boy with the 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish which went on to completely feed a crowd of 5000.