

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 12th 2013

Today's reading of the loaves and the fishes flooded me with memories from my formative years as I find this scripture one of the most accessible and vivid readings to a child. I remember times when I was amazed that Jesus had such miraculous power to create more bread and fish than the crowd could use. I also remember thinking that perhaps Jesus did not need to create anything new but he urged everyone to share the food they had been hiding for themselves thus creating a bounty. I wonder if I came up with this idea as my parents were often loading us in the car with a box of bologna sandwiches and a cooler of Kool Aid drink, so I couldn't imagine anyone heading out without some food.

Wishing for a fresh perspective on this comfortable reading, I decided to Google "loaves and fishes" to learn what others might be saying. The first thing that popped up was Loaves and Fishes as the name of many groups feeding the poor. What a meaningful name for such an important ministry. There is also a Loaves and Fishes cookbook by Anne Pump which has been lauded by the Barefoot Contessa, Ina Garten, a well-known cook brought to fame on the Food Network on television. Google always opens my eyes to something new.

And then I saw Loaves and Fishes Dorothy Day and was immediately reminded of Day's 1963 book in which she speaks about her work. Loaves and fishes is an appropriate frame for her work in the development of the Catholic Worker movement which is grounded in the firm belief in the God-given dignity of every human person. Jesus certainly honors that dignity by ensuring that each and every person had something to eat when they came to see him on the mountain.

Dorothy Day in Loaves and Fishes cites an essay which had been published in The Catholic Worker by Peter Maurin titled A Case for Utopia: "The world would be better off if people tried to become better, and people would become better if they stopped trying to become better off. For when everyone tries to become better off nobody is better off. But when everyone tries to become better everyone is better off. Everyone would be rich if nobody tried to become richer and nobody would be poor if everybody tried to be the poorest. And everybody would be what he ought to be if everyone tried to be what he wants the other fellow to be." Dorothy Day saw these words as still relevant in 1967. And they resonate with me today.

The relevance is particularly appropriate with our new Pope lifting our awareness of the needs of the poor. In his inaugural address Pope Francis offered a passionate pledge to serve "the poorest, the weakest, and the least important." Pope Francis appeals to leaders of nations and to each of us to be called to service.

Dorothy Day was a complicated person with a simple message. The story of the loaves and the fishes and the work of Dorothy Day inspire me to live simply so I can continually strive to become better and try to be what I want the other fellow to be.

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