

Homily for July 25:

Today, in the feeding of the multitudes, we are given a detail about when this took place. We are told that the Jewish feast of Passover was near. All the Gospels give different details. One of Saint John's contributions is that he mentions the Passover on three different occasions. Without him, people arguing from the bible alone could come to the conclusion that Our Lord's ministry lasted but a few months. As is, it encompassed two to three years, marked in John but the Passover. The first mention is when the Wedding Feast at Cana took place. The second is here. The third is the Last Supper. Wine, Bread, and Passover Last Supper.

These three events are bound to each other and the cross. The Passover was a ritual meal, a sacrificial meal. Christ is our Passover, our sacrifice. The meaning of the Multiplication of the loaves and fish to feed thousands is linked to the Eucharist, where Christ feeds us with more than can satisfy our hungry and weary hearts.

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Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg of Reno mentions, as a first lesson that can be drawn from this passage, that Jesus wants to draw His disciples into a deeper faith. The crowd who follows, we are told, have come because they saw signs performed. Christ is going to invite them to a deeper understanding.

And so Jesus sits down. This is a position that teachers would take. Our Lord's miracle is meant more than anything else to be a lesson. It is a lesson in God's abundant grace. It is a lesson about how He can take what little we have and do marvelous things. It is about receiving from Him what cannot be gotten anywhere else. And for the rest of the chapter, he will teach what this miracle means about Him and all who come to Him.

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Today is the First World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

Pope Francis has even given instructions for a plenary indulgence for the elderly and for those who visit the elderly.

The Church Universal has written some fine thoughts regarding our Gospel reading today tying into this World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly. The rest of this homily time I offer portions of those words.

I note that there is no description given by the Vatican on what constitutes “elderly.” As someone ordained thirty-two years and only sixty years old, I am very aware that a large percentage of our priest consider me to be one of the “old guys.”

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This World Day that we are celebrating today can help us to understand that all of us, young and old, grandparents and grandchildren, whether or not we belong to the same family, are [as we hear in our Second Reading] “one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call”. This awareness comforts us and shapes us as a people as we gather around the altar on which the Lord multiplies the bread of life and the Word of our salvation. The elderly – like the young – are important. Without them the body of the Church lacks something.

• *Gathered together as a people around the Lord, we discover the beauty of being part of the same family and of being able to feel that we are all children – even those of us who are advanced in years – beloved of the one Father. So we understand that, as the Pope says in Fratelli Tutti, we are not saved alone. This is what those five thousand gathered around Jesus experienced, and it is clearer today to all of us who live at a time still affected by the pandemic. The elderly are not saved by themselves alone because they need strong legs on which to make their dreams walk. Young people are not saved by themselves alone because they need someone to tell them that even from a dark night, the sun of a new dawn can rise.*

• *The scene presented in the Gospel helps us to understand how, even in everyday family life, whatever each of us possesses can be a great resource for all of us. In the passage we have heard, a boy brings to Jesus “five barley loaves and two fish”; today it is more common for grandparents to possess material goods. But what counts is not having a little or a lot, but presenting it to the Lord who multiplies our bread and ensures that it satisfies the desire of every living person (Ps 144). Grandparents, then, have the specific task of transmitting the faith to the younger generations and accompanying their grandchildren with their wisdom. They need to help them to avoid losing touch with their roots and to build their lives on solid foundations.*

• Sometimes what we possess is not material. If we think of our grandparents, what they often bring to our families is precisely the gift of gratuitousness. Their way of loving and pampering their grandchildren, to the point of spoiling them, may seem exaggerated to us, but exaggeration is the only measure of love.

• Even the most impoverished and frail of us possesses those two fishes of love and prayer. To pray is a vocation accessible to all. In his message for this World Day, the Pope quotes Benedict XVI when speaking of prayer as a specific mission of the elderly: “the prayer of the elderly can protect the world and help it perhaps more incisively than the toil of so many. Your prayer is a most precious resource: it is a lung of which the Church and the world cannot be deprived...Especially at this time [...], your intercession for the world and for the Church is not in vain, but shows everyone the serene confidence of having a firm foothold”.

• In the parallel passage in Mark (6:41), the Lord Jesus entrusts the disciples with the task of distributing the loaves to the crowd. It is a task that he continues to entrust to the Church today. We alone cannot perform the miracle, but Jesus needs our hands so that the bread can feed those who need it. Let us think of how many elderly people in our parishes are ministers of the Eucharist or have other ministries, and how precious this is for the life and the liturgy of our communities.