

Shrine of Our Lady of the Alleghenies, Loretto
Sunday, July 29, 2012
Mass for Married Couples
Homily

After supper one evening a husband had just settled into his favorite chair to read the newspaper and his wife had just started with her knitting and the phone rang. The wife went to the kitchen to answer the phone and came back just a few minutes later.

She told her husband that their recently married daughter was calling and she wanted to talk with him. The daughter and her new husband just had their first big argument.

The father went out to the kitchen and returned rather quickly to the living room where his wife had resumed her knitting. The mother asked, "What did our daughter say? The father replied, "She said she wanted to come home."

"What did you tell her?" asked the mother. He replied, "I told her she was home."

Most of us know people, including ourselves, who sometimes think that in times of difficulty, we can always turn to someone else for help. Many of us have used the expression, "God will provide." Most of here know and believe that God does provide.

That belief is certainly supported by what we hear in the Scripture readings today. Both the 2nd Book of Kings and the Gospel story speak about people being fed by God. And the psalm says that the hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Divine providence has to do with God's intervention or involvement in the world. Divine providence is distinguished between

- general providence which refers to God continuing to uphold the existence and natural order of our world and the entire universe and
- special providence refers to God's extraordinary intervention in the life of people

When God's extraordinary intervention occurs in a way in which it cannot be explained by the rules of nature, we call that a miracle. Today's Gospel story is about a miracle; the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. It is the only miracle of Jesus that is found in all 4 gospels.

The disciples admitted that they lacked the resources to feed the huge crowd which included 5,000 men, as well as women and children. They said to Jesus, "Two hundred days wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little to eat."

But there was a child, a boy who had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. The disciples were still pessimistic: "What good is that for so many people?"

The boy is a significant part of the story. The fact that he brought just a little bread and fish shows that he was prepared; he was cooperating with the general providence of God. The boy's trust in God in that way drew him into an experience that involved God's extraordinary intervention.

In Jesus' time, children were not given credit for anything. They really didn't matter. The presence of this boy with the bread and the fish is a reminder of what Jesus said about the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus said,

- the kingdom of God belongs to children
- in order for us to belong to that Kingdom we must become like children

We must become like a young boy who cooperates with God's general plan to love us and to provide for us. We must also become like a young boy who trusts in that divine providence so much, that he doesn't hesitate to hand over to Jesus what little he has. As a result, the boy becomes an important part of a miracle; an extraordinary intervention of God in the life of his people.

Since the time of the Apostles, theologians and Bible scholars and preachers have observed that this miracle story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish should make us think about what we are doing right now.

We are here to celebrate the most extraordinary intervention of God in our world. In every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we remember and we praise and thank God for the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;

the Passover of the Lord. The miracle story today took place just as the Jewish feast of Passover was to begin.

This Eucharistic celebration begins with our hearing God's word. The miracle story today begins with Jesus teaching the large crowd.

Even though the crowd had been following him attentively, Jesus recognized that they were still hungry. So he took the 5 loaves, gave thanks, and distributed the multiplied loaves to everyone, with plenty to spare. In a few minutes someone will present bread and wine and they will be transformed into something much more. They will become the Body and Blood of Christ who wishes to feed us and satisfy our needs.

None of us can escape from the need to be fed or to be satisfied, because none of us is perfectly complete. We need the help of others and others in turn need our help. And we all certainly need God's help.

Today in this Mass we focus our attention especially on married couples. This Eucharistic celebration is part of our year-long diocesan Marriage Building Initiative through which we want to draw attention to the first vocation.

In the vocation of marriage, God calls a man and woman to come together to form an intimate partnership of life and love

- that is for their individual good and fulfillment
- that is for the good and fulfillment of their spouse
- that is for the good and fulfillment of children who they are to welcome as a gift from God and as a sign of God's love.

This intimate partnership of life and love for husband and wife is to be made as a life-long commitment. Everyone knows that to make and to keep such a commitment is not always easy. There will be challenges and difficulties.

At the same time we are reminded that God is with us and for us. God is present to married couples and God is willing to assist them. God does provide. But God shares the work of providing care and support to all of us who are his disciples.

That expression of divine providence as it impacts the lives of married couples begins in the home of the families in which they were nurtured. The

first teachers for all of us are our parents. We should not overlook the little ways that our lives are shaped by their experiences and their example.

I am sure that the married couple who heard the phone ring after supper one evening had their share of challenges. That's probably why their daughter did not hesitate to call them as she experienced the first big challenge in her marriage.

The parents of that young wife were at home with each other and the father's reminder that to his daughter that she is at home, is a simple but wise observation.

Anyone of us can easily run away from the challenges of life. But we are called to be like Christ our Lord. We are called to be faithful and committed.

As St. Paul says to us today in the Letter to the Ephesians

- Every one of us, is to live in a manner worthy of the call we have received.
- We are to bear with one another through love;
- We are called to respond to God's ongoing providence and his occasionally extraordinary providence with humility, gentleness, and patience.

In May of this year, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, reminds us in a catechesis he gave on marriage and family life that we live in a society which increasingly tends to misunderstand and even ridicule the essential dimension of Christian teaching.

That essential teaching is that Jesus Christ is the perfect and complete revelation of God's love

- God's saving love
- God's faithful, committed, and everlasting love.

The Holy Father reminds us that because of the circumstances of our society, young people need to be reassured that "if we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, absolutely nothing, of what makes life free, beautiful and great"

I have had the privilege of knowing so many married couples in my life;

- my brothers and sisters or nieces and nephews and their spouses
- and numerous others, including many who asked me for help
 - in their preparation for marriage
 - in the celebration of their wedding
 - in baptizing their children
 - in celebrating their anniversaries of marriage
 - in listening to them and counseling them when they had their first big argument or they were challenged by other circumstances including illness or loss of a job or those many things that can make them feel like calling their father to ask if they could come home

In all of those things, I try to do as Pope Benedict or his predecessor Blessed John Paul II would often say:

- we are all at home in the Church,
- and if we find ourselves not as sure about being at home in the Church where we can have access to divine providence, then we should ask for God's help and help from others,
- because the Church is a special place where every one of us is to do our part to satisfy the needs of others; even if it is as simple as what the one boy did in today's Gospel.

As we go forward with this diocesan Marriage Building Initiative, we all need to do our part to show married couples and those preparing for marriage that God does provide.

The boy in today's Gospel reading was the most prudent of all the thousands of people in the huge crowd because he brought along some food that he would need. At the same time, in his childlike innocence, he trusted in Jesus who took his few loaves and fish and proceeded to feed thousands.

With the help of God's grace as it comes to us in a special way in this Eucharist, we who are fed at the Lord's table are transformed. In response to this gift from God, the Body and Blood of Jesus, we can begin to see that each one of us has at least a small, worthwhile gift that we can share with others. Individually, and together, we have the resources and the ability to support marriages and family life.

Husbands and wives and their children need our help and our support so that they can be at home, with one another, with Christ, and with his Church.

And if they find themselves in trouble and the unity and bond of peace that St. Paul talks about today is weakened or broken, all the more reason why all of us should be the hands of Christ through which husbands and wives and all persons can experience the committed, and faithful, and everlasting love of God who answers all our needs.

Once again I wish to thank all of you for being here. Thank you for your prayers and your witness in support of marriage.