

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As we continue our reading of the gospel according to Matthew this week and next week we hear the accounts of two of Jesus' most striking miracles, this week the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21) and next week walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). It is clear that these two miracles make a deep impression on his disciples who witnessed them because from the scepticism they express today when faced by the sight of the large crowd, by the end of next week's episode they will be professing 'truly, you are the Son of God'.

Jesus' miracles are not random displays of power and authority but are expressions of divine compassion and generosity to others. In today's gospel reading Jesus not only feeds the five thousand but he precedes this by 'healing the sick'. God's compassion and generosity is also expressed in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 55:1-3), in which God promises not only water for the thirsty, and rich food for the hungry, but an everlasting covenant in which our soul will live.

In the second reading Saint Paul (Romans 8:35.37-39) also expresses his trust in God's providential care telling his readers that 'nothing can come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

As we look back on our lives, do we recognise moments when we felt God's compassion, generosity, and providential care in a very direct way? If we do then it is good to recall those moments, to recall how we felt at the time, and to make time to express our gratitude to God. Or do we feel that God has let us down, that when we needed him most, he wasn't there for us. Again, if that is how we feel we need to acknowledge that, and to express that to God in our prayer.

I recently heard once again the poem 'footprints' which I am sure is familiar to many of you, but I will remind you of it once again:

'One night a man had a dream. He dreamed
he was walking along the beach with the LORD.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.
For each scene he noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand: one belonging
to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of
his life there was only one set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very
lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it:

"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Perhaps it was in those moments that we felt most abandoned by the Lord that he was in fact providing for us more generously than ever.

A poem can be nice to read and listen to, but it is the words of Scripture that we hear in all our readings today that remind us of God's generosity, compassion, and providential care for us all. As we continue to celebrate our Eucharist, we join together in giving thanks to Him.

For a video version of this homily see: https://youtu.be/6nIE2IS_Zw8