

**18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 31, 2011
10 Am Liturgy**

The Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola

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Sometimes when I listen to myself preach, it gets scary. That happened as I prepared for today's homily. Things I've said in the past few weeks in this ambo haunted me. Some of you have heard me joke that I always try to preach to myself first. I preach what I know I need to hear from the day's readings. Sometimes it's too easy to preach about the obvious.

It's obvious today that the beautiful reading from Isaiah describes God's Messianic banquet where all who are thirsty come to the water and drink. All who are hungry, whether they have money or not, eat their fill without paying and without cost. And it's further clear that Matthew's telling of the miraculous feeding of the 5000 (not, I'm sure you noticed, even counting the women and children—nothing new there!), Matthew's telling is Jesus fulfillment of that Promise. Psalm 145 picks-up the same themes: "the hand of the Lord feeds us; God answers all our needs." And,

for good measure, even Paul is on the same page today: “nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus.”

Here start some of my scary memories from recent homilies. On Pentecost Sunday, only a few weeks back, I quoted a poem/prayer composed by the great Spanish mystic St. Teresa of Avila. “Christ has no body now on earth but ours. No hands but ours. No feet but ours. Ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out on the world. Ours are the feet with which he goes around doing good. Ours are the hands with which he blesses us now.” Hold her thought!

Just two weeks ago, I mentioned an extremely challenging book of new parables called *The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales* (Peter Rollins, Paraclete Press, 2009). Let me share with you the Peter Rollins’ new version of today’s Gospel.

It’s called *Jesus and the Five thousand (A First World Translation)*.

“Jesus withdrew privately by boat to a solitary place, but the crowds continued to follow him. Evening was now approaching and the people, many of whom had travelled a great distance, were growing hungry. Seeing this Jesus sent his disciples out to gather

food, but all they could find were five loaves of bread and two fishes. Then Jesus asked that they go out again and gather up the provisions that the crowds had brought to sustain them in their travels. Once this was accomplished, a vast mountain of fish and bread stood before Jesus. Upon seeing this he directed the people to sit down on the grass.

Standing before the food and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks to God and broke the bread. Then he passed the food among his twelve disciples. Jesus and his friends ate like kings in full view of the starving people. But what was truly amazing, what was miraculous about this meal, was that when they had finished the massive banquet there were not even enough crumbs left to fill a starving person's hand."

Dr. Rollins continues saying: "The initial shock of this story relates to the way it inscribes selfish and inhumane actions onto Christ himself by twisting the story we all know of Jesus feeding the multitude....Yet in the Bible we read that those who follow Christ are nothing less than the manifestation of his body in the world today....The presence of Christ in the world is directly encountered

in the presence of those who gather together in his name.” Can you still hear St. Teresa?

The haunting part of my experience comes from my inability to avoid—try as I often do—the headlines on TV and in newspapers. As I stand here this morning I am now painfully aware of the fact that there are 11 million people facing starvation in Somalia alone. Eleven million people—and this does include at least 2 million children! I cannot even fathom those numbers. And I feel helpless and dumb at the fact. I know how complicated the situation is in Africa. But it makes the First World parable of Jesus enjoying himself with his friends while others starve on the hillside more than a little bit haunting. For me, it’s scary.

Now let me hasten to add a promise I made to myself on the day I was ordained a deacon, almost 40 years ago. I promised myself that I would never, ever make people in church feel motivated by guilt. Guilt is not a good motivator. We’ve all had enough of those experiences in church. So this is not to make anyone feel guilty. But I hope awareness and consciousness can at motivate at least prayer. Prayer at least.

No guilt, please! To return to St. Paul for a minute: not even my helplessness or indifference can separate me from God's love in Christ Jesus. I don't *have* to do anything!

But what I keep coming away with this week is that the Messianic Banquet that we all long for and wait for and pray for may need to be served by us. And soon!

We honor our Patron today, St. Ignatius of Loyola. He reminds us of something very similar at the end of his *Spiritual Exercises*. Real love manifests itself in deeds, not words.

And yet we are all the people of that great Messianic Promise. All of this listening to myself does make it all seem kind of scary. "Christ has no body now on earth but ours." That is scary!