

**FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY**  
**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**July 25, 2021**  
**“Pennies from Heaven”**

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In last Sunday’s Gospel we saw how Jesus, as a good shepherd, could recognize the needs of his Apostles. They needed rest and so He led them to a remote place where they could rest and not be disturbed for a short while. In today’s Gospel, Jesus is now addressing the needs of the many people who have followed Him to an out of the way place (Mk 6:30-34) (Jn 6:1-15).

Jesus knew that they must be hungry so he asked His disciples where they might “buy” bread for the people. He knew that feeding the people in this typical way would be impossible, but He wanted to draw the knowledge of this fact out of His Apostles. “Two hundred days wages were not enough to feed these people”, they said.

A young boy had several loaves of bread and a couple of dried fish. Jesus prayed a blessing over the bread and told His disciples to distribute the bread among the many peoples. All had their fill of bread. Again, Psalm 23 comes to mind. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” And Psalm 145: “The eyes of all looks hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season.”

In the process, Jesus teaches His disciples a very important lesson, that everything is a gift from God, even the smallest thing, and nothing of His gifts should be wasted. He instructs them to pick up the pieces of bread that were left over. But why bother with pieces of bread? Jesus has the power to make all the bread that He wants, but we don’t. And Jesus will not always be with us to perform miracles.

There is a time when food is plentiful and there will be a time when it is not. Picking up the fragments for future needs reminds us of this. Prepare for the time of famine during the time of plenty. We have all heard the phrase “waste not want not!” To waste is to take God’s generosity for granted. God always provides for us but not always in the proportions that we would like. Consider Joseph in Egypt. God told Joseph to prepare for seven years of famine by using wisely seven years of plenty (Gn 41:25-32).

How many of us have walked past a penny lying in the parking lot? We don’t need that penny today – but what about tomorrow? We remember the saying of Ben Franklin – “a penny saved is a penny earned”, or how a penny saved with compound interest can earn 1 million dollars in 30 days.

By picking up the small fragments of bread Jesus teaches His disciples to pay attention to details, especially spiritual details. For example, performing small spiritual acts produces big spiritual dividends, like the penny. For example, small

gestures of love, they may not seem like much, but if you are on the receiving end of these little gestures they can mean a lot: a kind word, being on time, a little favor for someone, holding the door for someone, offering a smile to someone that you don't care for, listen with interest to someone who is not very interesting, offer a word of encouragement, hold your opinion when you are bursting to give it, listen to someone else's opinion patiently. Doing these seemingly small things builds character. Don't waste an opportunity to do these. Deposit these "spiritual pennies" in your spiritual bank account and you will reap the rewards.

In multiplying the loaves and fishes and feeding the multitudes, Jesus performed a huge miracle – but in doing so He did not neglect the smaller details. Those small pieces of bread likely went on to feed many people. This should be our attitude when helping those in need. The little that we give can go a long way. And who is to say that God does not multiply the pennies that we give, like He multiplied the loaves and fishes?

Those small pieces of bread were valuable to Jesus and His action reminds me of the Eucharist. When distributing the Eucharistic bread, the priest pays close attention to detail – being careful not to lose even a tiny piece of the sacred host, because each little piece is the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus. By the same divine power that Jesus multiplied the loaves, He makes himself present in each particle of the Eucharistic bread. The priest gathers up each small piece and consumes it, nothing is left behind, nothing is wasted or neglected.

Let us strive to follow Jesus' example and take care of the little things, pay attention to detail – especially spiritual details, because they will pay dividends beyond our imagining, and it is a sign of our love for God and our appreciation for the many gifts He has given to us.