

# ORDINARY GRACE

**Weeks 18–34**

Daily Gospel Reflections



by the Daughters of St. Paul

## Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time— Year A



### *Lectio*

Matthew 14:13–21

### *Meditatio*

*“Give them some food yourselves.”*

In today’s Gospel, the disciples approach Jesus to remind him that the people need to eat. The disciples are probably so concerned about the crowd’s hunger because they are hungry too. They have all endured a long day in this “deserted place.” Because the disciples choose to give Jesus their own meager food, they must have had a fundamental trust in Jesus to provide for their needs. They could have tried to hide the food for themselves, but the Gospel simply reports that the disciples give Jesus their “five loaves and two fish.” After Jesus blesses the food and gives it back to his disciples, they freely give it away to the crowds.

Like the disciples in today’s Gospel, I can only share in Jesus’ ministry of feeding and caring for his people when I generously give the Lord all that I have, even if it seems as insignificant as five loaves and two fish. The Lord takes me as I am, multiplies my gifts, and gives it all back to me a hundredfold. But this passage also reminds me that I am not

meant to keep the Lord's gifts for myself. I receive the Lord's abundance so that I might freely share it with his people. I pray that I may grow in responding generously to the Lord as he shows me how he wants to bring life and love to others through me. Sometimes this may mean bringing food and physical life, but often it means offering a good word, a listening ear, or a supportive presence. When I live these simple daily actions with the Lord, they can become the ways in which God feeds and loves his people through me.

### *Oratio*

Jesus, you know how often I try to reason through situations, trusting in myself and in my own strength. Help me to move away from this way of thinking, acting, and praying, so that I can more completely depend on you. May I bring to you my problems and concerns for myself and those I love. I believe you give me the strength to live each day as your disciple, in the midst of the difficulties I face along the way. Help me to be generous in sharing with others the good things you have given me, and to believe that you will always provide me with all that I need.

### *Contemplatio*

“Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

## Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time— Year B



### *Lectio*

John 6:24–35

### *Meditatio*

*“ . . . they . . . came to Capernaum looking for Jesus.”*

Today, we read about the crowd’s response when they discover that Jesus and his disciples have crossed to the other side of the sea. They follow them and ask, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” They had just experienced one of Jesus’ most amazing miracles, the feeding of the five thousand. Yet it isn’t enough. They want more. So, they cross the sea to find him.

I’ve always wondered if they really knew what they were searching for. Jesus chides them for seeking the wrong things. They had just received a free meal. Their stomachs are full and their souls are touched, but do they know that they need Jesus’ words, compassion, and presence? They need the Master to help them understand their deeper desires.

We often go about our daily lives doing what we need to do, what’s expected of us, what we think will give us fulfillment. Yet in our very depths we feel an ache, a desire that keeps gnawing at us. Do we understand what we are feeling underneath all the externals? Have we ever really quieted our-

selves enough to reflect and examine what that desire is? We long for intimacy, but can another person really fulfill our deepest desires? We long for communion, but can we ever find complete harmony and unity with others? By giving us his very self, his body and blood, Jesus answers this most basic need of the human soul—the need for love. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Our souls yearn for love. The Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ is the perfect expression of love. By giving us himself as the Bread of Life, he is offering to us this most enduring and fulfilling of all loves. Let us look into our hearts and ask the Master for the grace to recognize our need for him to fulfill our genuine desires for love.

### *Oratio*

Master of Love and Bread of Life, come and fill my soul with your presence. I want so many things, and I often put a lot of effort into fulfilling my desires, looking for new places and experiences. But what do I really want, deep down? Help me know and believe that only you can answer the desires and longings of my heart. I surrender my life to your love.

### *Contemplatio*

“Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (Ps 34:11).

## Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time— Year C



### *Lectio*

Luke 12:13–21

### *Meditatio*

*“ . . . life does not consist of possessions.”*

The story in Luke sounds all too familiar—relatives fighting over an inheritance. Sometimes it seems as if claimants think the money is owed to them. “I want what is coming to me.” Jesus calls it what it is: greed. Possessions are what we have, not who we are. In fact, even the poor can be greedy. Jesus reminds us that “life does not consist of possessions.” To illustrate his point he tells a story. A rich farmer (note the man is already rich) has a wonderful year with an abundant harvest. His only problem is where to store it. His solution: build a larger facility. “I’ll tear down the old buildings and put up bigger, better ones, and then I’ll take it easy.”

Greed, injustice to workers, neglect of land, wasting one’s own productive years in laziness or by the idleness of an early and unproductive retirement—all of these are reflected in what the rich man plans to do, without realizing that his last moment is coming. “Your life will be required of you this very night.” The end is coming suddenly, so he

can't fudge intentions. He is caught in his greed and laziness. When there is no concern for others, the judgment will always come as a surprise. It is always so for those "who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God." Jesus already said that God isn't concerned with what we possess, and that we can't take any of it with us to the Great Accounting. All we can take is who we are. That is what matters to God. What riches, then, is he looking for? God values one who is rich in love of God and concern for others. These unseen treasures are our only inheritance. This is what Jesus meant when he said that the poor in spirit are blessed (see Mt 5:3).

### *Oratio*

Jesus, Lord of all, you chose to give us a living example of the beauty and value of poverty, that true poverty of the spirit. Not only were you divested of the very glory and grandeur of your heavenly home, but you were born a poor, homeless child placed by your loving parents in an animals' feeding trough. You were chased and harassed throughout your early years. For announcing the Good News, healing, and praying, your own people rewarded you with the death of a dispossessed criminal. Accept my humble gift of a heart bent on imitating your total self-gift, a spirit poor but blessed. Amen.

### *Contemplatio*

"Take care to guard against all greed."

## Monday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time



### *Lectio*

Matthew 14:13–21

### *Meditatio*

*“ . . . give them some food yourselves.”*

By placing this rural event right after his flashback to the martyrdom of John the Baptist, Matthew achieves a stark contrast. Two banquets are portrayed—one in a fortress, attended only by the elite and featuring sensuality and death; the other in the open air, attended by anyone/everyone and featuring healing and life. The multiplication of the loaves is more or less the midpoint in a long trajectory that began with the manna in the desert and continued with the multiplication of barley loaves by the prophet Elisha. The scene in the hills of Galilee looks forward to the Last Supper and the Church’s Eucharist, as well as the heavenly banquet mentioned in Isaiah 25:6 and Matthew 8:11–12.

Rereading this passage, I was drawn to Jesus’ command to his disciples: “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” The disciples show Jesus the little food they have. Acting in the role of the father of a Jewish family, Jesus takes the bread, says the blessing, breaks the bread, and hands it back to his disciples to distribute.



Mysteriously, there is enough bread for everyone, just as in the future the divine-human *presence of Jesus* would be mysteriously multiplied in the Eucharist, so that all the faithful can be nourished with the bread of life.

Thinking of the disciples' role in this, I remembered reading or hearing more than once that our poor prayers, our half-hearted sacrifices, our small acts of kindness can be multiplied by the Lord, as if zeroes were being added to the number 1. We give our "little," and the Lord makes that small contribution bear much fruit for his people. Jesus asks our cooperation, then he does the rest, just as he did with the disciples.

### *Oratio*

Lord Jesus, help me to remember the importance of my small contributions, whatever they may be. When overcome by "weariness in well-doing," I want to keep in mind the disciples, who, until everyone had been fed, kept distributing the bread you had blessed and broken for the crowd. Help me to realize that the little I do has a much fuller meaning than I could ever imagine—a meaning I may never understand in this life, but will make me very happy in the next. Don't let me get discouraged, thinking I'm not getting anywhere. Help me to move ahead with purer motives and a lighter heart. Amen.

### *Contemplatio*

"There is no need for them to go away."