

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time A “Hands”

Fr. Frank Schuster

An author who calls himself, Fr. Pat, wrote a little poem entitled, “In whose hands”. It was written a long time ago, so I updated it a bit:

A football in my hands is worth about \$30.

A football in Richard Sherman’s hands is worth about \$40 million.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6.

A baseball in Robinson Cano’s hands is worth about a quarter billion.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A computer in my hands is worth about a thousand dollars.

A computer in Bill Gate’s hands is about 85 billion dollars.

It depends whose hands it's in.

Meanwhile, two fish and five loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.

Two fish and five loaves of bread in God's hands will feed thousands.

It depends whose hands it's in.

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse.

Nails in Jesus Christ's hands will produce salvation for the entire world.

It depends whose hands it's in.

As you see now it depends whose hands it's in.

So, Fr. Pat concludes, we should put our concerns, our worries, our fears, our hopes, our dreams, our families, and our relationships in God's hands because --

It depends whose hands they're in.”

My friends, the Gospel begins with Jesus needing a vacation. Quite appropriate given that I just returned from mine. Thank you for putting up with my absence. A little background on our Gospel reading: Jesus just heard about the murder of his cousin John at the hands of the local king. He knew that people already were talking about him as being “the next John the Baptist”. I think it is quite reasonable that the Lord needed to take time away in a deserted place. Just like you and I need time, every so often, to recharge our batteries, so did Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel reading. What I find humorous is, when the crowds heard of this they followed Jesus anyway. They weren’t going to let him get away. So Jesus gets into this boat and tries to get away from the crowds by sea. A very clever idea. The problem was the Sea of Galilee, for those who don’t know, is actually a lake. It is a good size lake, but you can see the other sides of the lake from any shore. You can drive around it in a little over an hour. So Jesus is in this boat, trying to get away, but the crowds of people can see immediately where he is heading and begin walking along the shore in that direction. When Jesus gets off the boat and steps onto the shore, the crowd is there waiting for him. His immediate reaction could have been burnout, but instead Jesus’ heart was moved by pity. Jesus’ heart was moved and begins to heal the sick there. I think this is a helpful scripture passage to remember whenever our vacations don’t go as planned.

Now something kind of funny happens. At evening, the disciples approach Jesus and said, “This is a deserted place and it is already late, dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy some food.” There were about 20,000 people there and the disciples were calling it a deserted place. What they meant was, there were a lot of people there and not enough food to go around. The disciples looked around and, as usual, saw problems. Jesus, however, had this ability to look past the problems and see the opportunity. “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.”

Hear that again. “Give them some food yourselves”. This command from Jesus echoes throughout the centuries. This is why as Church it is part of our business to care for the poor. This is why we support St Vincent de Paul, the local food bank, sandwich making for the homeless, our Kibera orphans, and the list goes on. Jesus tells the disciples, “give them some food yourselves.” That command echoes throughout the centuries.

Of course, the disciples’ response also echoes throughout the centuries, “But Lord, we don’t have enough!” “Five loaves and two fish are all we have here.” In our hands, all we have are a couple of fish sandwiches. In Jesus’ hands, however, look what happens! Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, looks up to heaven, said the blessing, broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples who in turn gave them to the crowds. Notice that Jesus passes on his grace to those he calls his disciples, and then commands the disciples to mediate this grace to the masses. Kind of looks like an Apostolic Church here, doesn’t it? It looks a lot like the celebration of Eucharist we celebrate in our Church today and everyday doesn’t it? And the bible says everyone ate and they were satisfied. They were satisfied. Notice also that they didn’t leave the fragments on the ground or throw anything away. They picked up the fragments, kind of like we do after every communion, don’t we? We place those fragments in the tabernacle. Why?

Because Christ did not just feed the crowd bread in that deserted place, did he? The whole event of the multiplication of the loaves is a dramatic foreshadowing of the institution of Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. God wants to feed His people with His very self. Even the fish give it away, because the Greek word for fish is Ichthys. Every letter of the word Ichthys forms the acronym, Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter, Jesus Christ Son of God Savior. You have seen the fish symbols on car bumpers. It comes from this early Church symbol for Christians, the Ichthys. Back when it was illegal to be Christian, to see if you were talking with another Christian, you would make a half circle in the dirt with your foot, if the person you were talking with completed the fish sign with his foot, you knew you were in the presence of a believer. I also love different variations of the fish symbol on car bumpers. You have the alien fish. The Darwin fish with legs on it. The Jesus shark eating the Darwin fish, you know, survival of the fittest. It all began with the Ichthys. Interesting things you learn at church!

My friends, Jesus doesn't want to just feed the multitude with bread and fish. He wants to feed the multitude with the gift of His very self. You see, Jesus knew that the multitudes followed Him out into a deserted place, not because they were physically hungry, but because they were spiritually hungry. And we all know that there is a hunger within us that normal food cannot satisfy. We have spiritual cravings that cannot be filled with anything this earth has to offer. And we have the nasty habit of filling that hungry place with everything that doesn't satisfy the hunger of the heart. Like Isaiah notices in the first reading, we spend our wages on things that fail to satisfy. Like St. Augustine noticed, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Or as St. Therese of Avila observed, whoever has God lacks nothing, God alone suffices.

And so we are invited to consider, have you ever found yourself in a desolate time or place looking for the Lord? St. Paul describes that desolate place as anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and the sword. My friends, when were those times you felt you were in a spiritually desolate place? Have you ever asked yourself Isaiah's question, "Why spend your wages for what fails to satisfy? Now, hear again Isaiah's invitation to come to the waters. Remember the waters of our baptism! In baptism we are reborn into the Body of Christ. When we receive the Eucharist, we are to become the Body of Christ. St. Teresa of Avila again, His eyes become our eyes. His feet become our feet. His hands become our hands.

And so, let's take a moment and look at our hands. Go ahead, lift up your hands and take a look at them. Is everyone looking at their hands? Go ahead, look at your hands for a moment. Dangerous things, hands! Hands are amazing things. They can do so much good and they can do so much evil. Now, what would happen if we understood that in the Eucharist, our hands are now Christ's hands? See your hands now as Christ's hands for a moment. What if our hands are Christ's hands? Will this make a difference in my relationships? Will this make a difference in how I work? Will this make a difference in how I budget? Would this make a difference in how I treat those in need? Will this make a difference in how I treat myself, my family, my coworkers, my world, if my hands are now Christ's hands? The Good News of the Gospel reading today is God's grace is superabundant. All that is needed to transform our world is our hands.