

St Pius-St Anthony 17th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B

That last line about Jesus slipping away, lest the people carry Him off as king, lets us know that one perspective within which to view this miracle is that of Christian leadership, and that Jesus desires to be a king-leader, but not in the expected sense that the people may have of typical kings. Also, note that this is John's gospel and it is only John's gospel that has Jesus later say to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). So today, Jesus shows Himself to be the King of little things, the little ones-us! To take a minute to review some of the things Jesus had also been teaching to let us know what it means to be in His Kingdom, let's recall that when children were being pushed away in Matthew 19:14, Jesus says "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Or also, in Matthew 18:3, Jesus says, "unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." or on another occasion he said it all a different way when he told Nicodemus in John 3:3 "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again from above (from Spirit)." He is saying be born again 'little'-become little again. And today's gospel shows such an entrance into the kingdom of God, and who turns out to be the leader: A child, a little boy saves the day! Faced with a huge hungry crowd, Jesus first turns (to show how it won't work) to the helpful apostle Philip, that knows markets and is networked into the local business community, yet this worldly resourceful Philip comes up empty saying, "even if we had two hundred days wages, *and* I could get hands on enough food supplies out here, still we'd only be able to give an appetizer to each person ('I'm tapped out'- Philip was saying). I think Jesus was teaching Philip humility about his business savvy independence, and to be more open to Jesus' miraculous kingdom interventions (that God can work through the least among us, the overlooked and left out). In His kingdom, Jesus wants us to turn to Him first, rely on him, not our own proud accomplishments, to enter the kingdom with him. So Jesus had looked to Philip (testing him), & Philip looked to the world's ways and the world came up empty. And then, it happens, a child steps up, who humbly presents all he has to Jesus, (only five loaves and two fish) and Jesus will feed over 5,000 people that day with the child's help! When I hear about this child, this boy saving this day or stepping up to give/do something to meet such a need, I remember one of the earlier prophecies circulating with the talk of a coming messiah (we hear it a lot around Advent-Christmas) from Isaiah 11:6 "*the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young*

lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them.” Well, today, this little one leads the apostles, so I find Jesus celebrating the ‘little ones’ of God’s kingdom today! The lesson for us: don’t overlook the little ones. They lead!

Jesus used what others had ignored to provide for all the people’s needs. Jesus teaches all of us that in His kingdom, the least will lead, each person is important and everyone has a place. The little one leads (the one who knows they are little, knows they need God, and leans all the more on Him to pull through. So we don’t want to ignore the ‘little things’. I bet we can all relate to ‘little things’ saving the day. Imagine those times in our lives that what made the difference between great grief and relieving joy was something small, probably often overlooked, that we easily could have thrown away, ignored and never even noticed before, until we really needed it! Those experiences of ‘Oh, that is what that little piece does?’ I have that experience all the time, of picking up a little nut, a piece of metal or plastic, and having that sinking feeling of ‘This goes somewhere, to keep something running. Wonder what it is’ (But don’t worry, soon enough, the breaking thing won’t wait long to reveal itself to me).

Good question to ask, “When have little things/ones become a savior in some situation? If you needed one, you know them! If we don’t think little things make all the difference, then just recall the last time you lost a game by one point, one hit or strike, maybe even one walk, or one stroke. So Jesus celebrates the ‘little ones’ of His kingdom today, to let us know how important each member is, and that everyone has one’s own place with Him. You’ve likely heard this old teaching illustration attributed to Benjamin Franklin, about how a whole kingdom was lost because of the lack or losing of a single horseshoe nail. It says, that “For lack of a horseshoe nail, that shoe was lost. In need of a shoe, the horse was taken out of duty. In need of a horse, a rider-courier was kept at the barn. Without a rider, a message was lost not arriving to the front lines. Without the message, the front was lost tipping the battle into defeat. And with loss of that battle, the kingdom came down. All for the lack of one single horseshoe nail.” So much depends upon the smallest, so Jesus is telling us that the little things we perceive as insignificant, God can use to save His Kingdom. For Jesus, the little becomes great, the small provides for all. (This shouldn’t surprise us because Jesus always celebrated small things, for recall his mustard seed parables, how he entering Jerusalem hailed as king, on a little-lowly donkey, always saying the last is first, the first is last) I think Jesus multiplying these mere five loaves and two fish, that He was given from the otherwise insignificant little boy in the crowd (When I think of that child being

so important to Jesus- I wonder how many times before though, that this little child had been told, 'be seen and not heard', you're only a little fisher boy.)

But that day, Jesus had the child lead the crowd, lead the apostles by his generous act of giving all he had to help Jesus pull off the miracle of a generation (feeding the multitudes, and not just that, but more, as the gospel said there was enough left over for 12 wicker baskets). This is another great detail that the small things are most important to Jesus, because notice that He took time afterward to call the apostles to make sure that nothing is wasted, overlooked or ignored, so gather up those leftovers (as we will use them/need them later) No one is left out with Jesus. So today's gospel teaches us that in Jesus' kingdom, the little ones among us are celebrated, what we might call the least becomes the greatest and that whatever we offer (however small or insignificant we may think it is) Jesus can use for the help of others. If we apply our gift, Jesus will add what is needed to make it be enough, and more. Yet like the child in the gospel, we need to take our gift to Him, and offer our 'little' for Him to make it the 'lot' of His Kingdom. So, a closing question for us is to ask ourselves, "What is it that we have and can offer to God?"