

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2 August 2020.

God's Providence is sure: "The hand of the Lord feeds us, he answers all our needs" (Psalm 145:16).

Dear brothers and sisters, we often speak of Divine Providence by which we mean the invisible hand of God. He provides for us even when all hope seems lost. Have you ever experienced this in your life? How can you know the providence of God?

Last Sunday, we saw God's providence in the life of the young king Solomon. God provided for him in a way only God could. God gave Solomon the wisdom needed to lead vast numbers of people entrusted to him. David, his father, had handed over the throne to him and passed away. Solomon was inexperienced and faced the enormous responsibility of governing his people. The Lord came to his aid saying, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon asked for wisdom and the Lord gave him wisdom above everyone else. The secret for this blessing is that Solomon had his priorities right. He knew that God's providence is sure and he chose God who chose him before he was born.

In today's readings, we see God's providence in action. In the first reading the Lord said, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost" (Isaiah 55:1-2). The Lord further promised that He would renew with us the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David. How does the Lord fulfil these promises? What is the everlasting covenant and the

benefits assured to David? Beginning with the first question, the Lord showed us how he fulfils these promises. In the gospel, he cured those who were sick and fed the hungry crowd in the deserted place where there were no grocery stores or restaurants in sight. He cured the sick without any hospital in sight. He fed hungry people with only five loaves and two fishes. But, twelve wicker baskets of leftovers were picked up after over five thousand people had eaten and were satisfied (Matthew 14:20). The leftovers in this context signifies that there is enough for everybody on earth. Twelve baskets symbolize the totality of God's people.

What is the deeper significance of these miracles? It is revelatory. These miracles show that Jesus is the God who feeds and answers needs as Yahweh did for the Israelites on their journey from slavery in Egypt to the freedom in the Promised Land. Jesus is Yahweh. He has power over nature for he is Nature's God. Remember not only did God part the Red Sea for his people to pass on dry ground, but, while in the desert he rained manna and quails on his people and gave them water from the rock, he cured them of the bites of the poisonous snake (Exodus 16: 4, 13; 17:5, Numbers 21:6). The miracle of five loaves and two fishes point to the Lord Himself in the Eucharist. Note the similarities between this miracle and the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the last supper. Today's gospel says, "Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples" (Matthew 14:19). The Last Supper passage says, "Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). God alone satisfies our deepest longings. The passage next to today's gospel recounts another miracle our Lord performed which calls to mind the miracle in

the desert during the period of Exodus. Seeing that his Apostles were in danger of drowning because their boats were being tossed about by headwind, he came towards them walking on the sea, the moment he came into their boat the wind died down (Matthew 14: 25, 32).

What does all of these say about our life and "God's providence? First, our life is in his hands and he is ever near. His providence is sure. We hunger and toil for food and drink. But we also have a deeper hunger of the heart. The Lord alone is the One who can take care of this. Pope Benedict XVI writes ,

The Lord is on the mountain of the Father. Therefore he sees us. Therefore he can get into the boat of our life at any moment. Therefore, we can always call on him; we can always be certain that he sees and hears us. In our day, too, the boat of the Church travels against the headwind of history through the turbulent ocean of time. Often it looks as if it is bound to sink. But the Lord is there, and he comes at the right moment. That is the essence of the Christian trust, the reason for our joy.

The second part of the Lord's promise in the first reading mentioned the everlasting covenant and benefit assured to David (See 2 Kings 7:12-116). The Lord said to David, it is your son "who shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever" (2 Kings 7: 13). This is about the eternal dynasty promised to David and that his Son will build a temple for God. This was partially fulfilled in Solomon but the fullest fulfillment of it in Jesus. He is the Son of David who built his Church on the

rock and whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. All who are baptized into Christ belong to this kingdom.

I posed some questions at the beginning of this homily, "Have you ever experienced the Providence of God?" "How can you know the providence of God?" I can answer these questions with two stories. One day, I visited a family and as we sat around the table for dinner the youngest member of the family started crying . He was stretching out his right hand to grab his big sister's plate. He wanted to grab some tater-tots . Of course, his sister, who was four years old, did not let him. But the irony is that the baby had forgotten that he had some on his plate and in his left chubby hand. His father noticed that and pointed to the tater-tots in his left hand and on his plate. Instantly, the baby stopped crying and started shoving tater-tots into his mouth. We are often like that baby. Oftentimes, it takes looking back and inwards to see God's providence in our lives.

The second story, back then, I was still a seminarian. I was heading back to the Seminary after attending an ordination Mass of some friends on a Sunday. The bus carrying us - random passengers broke down in the middle of nowhere and the night was fast falling. There was no hope for another bus because they all came from that direction full. "Someone I didn't know was driving by in a pickup truck, I started flagging him down. The driver stopped and picked me up and I was able to arrive at the Seminary on time. Even if that bus had not broken down I would still have arrived after the Seminary gate was closed because it was moving at snail speed and I would have been expelled from the Seminary. Sometimes, the Providence of God comes in a disguise. The rest of the passengers came from the village where

the ordination happened and they were not interested in hitchhiking, so they went back to their homes.

Was this Providence absent in the life of John the Baptist who was beheaded by Herod? No! It was present because this world is not all that there is. What happens to us on earth helps to prepare us for the eternity of unconditional love with God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers our needs.