

17th Sunday Ord. Time (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
July 25, 26, 2015

Today's second Scripture continues as expected with words from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. We heard the opening lines from this Letter just a couple of weeks ago. What we hear today is: *"Iurge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."* (repeat) I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received

In light of both today's first Scripture and the gospel text of today, it would seem clear that the 'call we have received' is none other than to look after others and to care for others. Elisha asks that the 20 barley loaves brought to him be shared with the people: Elisha says, *"Give it to the people to eat."* And, Jesus says to Philip, *"Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"* Our call as disciples of Jesus is to look after and to care for others. And so that we do not limit who this 'others' is, we can refer to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which teaches that our neighbor is anyone and everyone who is in need. Or, we can refer to the Parable of the Rich Man who after telling Jesus how he had kept all of the commandments, asked Jesus, "What else should I do?" The answer Jesus gave him was no doubt a surprise, but one that we certainly remember: *"Go sell what you have, give it to the poor, and then come follow me."* This is living in the manner worthy of the call we have received.

But you may ask, "Who can do any of these things?" The disciples asked this same question of Jesus on more than one occasion. And Jesus' answer to them was, "Alone you cannot do this, or anything like this. But with God all things are possible." As disciples we must learn to believe this about ourselves. Yes, alone there are many things we cannot do. And we probably know this all too well. The thing we probably do not know as well, is that with God all things are possible. Just how do we learn this? We learn it by stepping out in faith.

Let me give you a couple of examples. These are from other parishes, and I do realize that comparisons are dangerous. I cite these examples not as comparisons, however, but simply as examples (of decisions made, and things accomplished).

If you look at someone's check book, or at the monthly summary sheet for an individual credit/debit card, you can tell how much money has been spent on oneself and how much money was actually shared with others, and particularly with others in need. This applies to a parish budget and check book as well. I know a parish that looked at its annual financial report, and saw first hand that very little of its financial resources were spent on things other than their own

parish needs. While they often asked parishioners to tithe, or give 5-10% of their income to the parish, the parish itself did not tithe its income. Almost every nickel taken in was spent either on parish bills or banked in parish savings accounts. Upon this realization they built into their annual budget a percentage of money to give to charity. I don't remember at what percentage level they started, but the last I heard they have been at 10% for a few years. For every \$1000 received on the weekend, they send \$100 to a charity. While doing this they have also almost completely paid down a new building debt.

Another example, a parish was preparing to celebrate a significant anniversary of its existence. They were looking for a project of some kind to observe their anniversary. It was to be something to give away in gratitude for their existence as a parish over the years. Ideas began to surface ... volunteer for this, volunteer for that. One idea was to give a gift to a charity, and when the amount of the gift was discussed, \$2500 was mentioned. Someone challenged the size, thinking it meager. Discussion continued until one of the elders of the parish said, "When we came here we had to remove a house in order to build our parish. Maybe it is time to give a house back." \$90,000 later, a house with Habitat for Humanity was built by the parishioners with the excess money sent away for another such house in a different area.

In the same Letter to the Ephesians that we are hearing from on these weekends, St. Paul says,

"To him whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine - to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations."

Immeasurably more than we ask or imagine we need to believe this. We cannot underestimate the truth of this statement. How did 20 loaves feed 100 people? How did 5 loaves and 2 fish feed 5000. How does \$2500 end up being \$90,000?

In caring for others we must step out in faith.

What can I do besides keep all the rules and regulations?

How do I recognize someone I don't even know, and who may even live far away as my neighbor?

We may think of ourselves as the little boy with only 5 loaves and 2 fish, but if shared can I believe that it matters to many?

I have even heard of people who are sometimes offended because they have been asked to give too little feeling their ability and their generosity has been under estimated and under appreciated.

Don't be afraid to share from your abundance, and even from your scarcity. *We are to live in a manner worthy of our calling*, and remember that *God can do immeasurably more in us than we can ask or imagine.*