Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug. 1-2, 2020, Cycle A

No one really knows the precise number of hungry people in the world, but the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated it to be approximately one of every seven people. The vast majority are in the Pacific, then Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, then North East and North Africa, and, finally, some 19 million in developed countries. In 1996, the World Food Summit set out to reduce the number of malnourished people by half by 2015. Although there has been modest progress in some areas of the world, the number of hungry people has actually increased, and the Coronavirus and Covid 19 are driving up the number of hungry up even further. Hunger was no stranger in the days of Jesus. In our Gospel passage from Matthew, Jesus acts to fulfill God's promise to fill the hungry with good things as he feeds a crowd of thousands. Matthew says there were five thousand men present, not counting women and children.

Now Jesus' feeding over five thousand certainly foreshadows the celebration of the Eucharist, where the Body and Blood of Jesus and the Word of Jesus will never run out, where there is enough nourishment for all. The feeding of the five thousand also prefigures that eternal Banquet in the Father's Kingdom, where our every hunger will be satisfied. Finally, Jesus is also saying something practical about feeding the hungry in our world today, when he feeds those 5,000 famished people.

Scientists tell us there could easily be enough food for everyone in the world today, and then some. But, as was true in Jesus' day too, food is all about power and money. It is the rich and the wealthy corporations who control the land, the means of food production and distribution. Therefore, not all have land enough to grow food, or sufficient income to purchase food, because of lack of opportunity for employment. Many of the battles and wars fought in the third world countries are over land distribution, which is in the hands of the few, many times in the hands of multi-national corporations.

The problems of worldwide hunger can seem so overwhelming and daunting for us that we say, I can't do much, I am only one person with very little means. When the disciples ran up to Jesus to tell him how hungry the crowd was, they figured they couldn't do much either. All we have are "Five loaves of bread and two fish." Better for them to try to make ends meet by relying on their own resources. Nonetheless, Jesus insists: "There is no need for them to go away; <u>give them some food yourselves</u>." Jesus is directing his disciples away from an impulse toward letting each person worry about his or herself, to a solution that calls on them as a community by pooling and redistributing their resources. By getting everyone to cooperate, Jesus transforms all they have, and there is enough, and more than enough, we are told there was twelve wicker baskets left over.

By the way, it is not arbitrary that Matthew has five loaves of bread and two fish. 5+2=7, a symbolic number for Jews, meaning perfection, wholeness, completeness, enough for everybody.

Today, Jesus is inviting us, as he invited those first disciples, to resist the temptation to consider it someone else's responsibility to address the problems of the destitute in the world, whether it be physical hunger, or any other need. Try to give our 2 cents worth to deal with human need is why parishes have a local St. Vincent de Paul chapter, why there is a Catholic Charities on the diocesan, national and international level, and why we have collections to support the efforts of St. Vincent DePaul, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services.

Jesus knows quite well that the problems of hunger, destitution and impoverishment are indeed overwhelming, and he is not asking me or you as an individual to solve the problems, but he is saying as a group we can pool our resources to begin to meet the hunger of those who are desperately in need.