Homily for 18th Sunday 2014  
Aug. 3, 2014  Place: Alumni Chapel  
Readings: Is. 55.1-3, Ps. 145, Rom. 8.35-39, Mt. 14.13-21  
Theme: God provides for us.

God provides for us. All of today’s readings proclaim that message. The Psalms, which are attributed to King David as early as 1000 BC, declare today, “The Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.” Today’s Old Testament reading from Deutero-Isaiah, written during times of Israel’s enslavement, compassionately invites believers, “All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come receive grain and eat.” Please note the spiritual message that follows, “Why spend your money for what is not bread; [why spend] your wages for what fails to satisfy? ... Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life.” St. Paul asks the Romans, “What will separate us from the love of Christ?” He proceeds to mention literally a dozen things. He concludes, “[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” And St. Matthew reports the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in which Jesus fed 5,000 men, plus countless women and children, and still had leftovers amounting to twelve wicker baskets full. This miracle anticipates Jesus’ providing believers with the Eucharist.

God provides for us. ... Let’s pause for a moment. How has God provided for you? Privately thank God for his provisions. ... If you are like everyone else in the world, you have been very blessed, but ............ many of your prayers still seem to have gone unanswered. ... Let’s pause, and ponder what you still need. Repeat your already oft-repeated needs. ...

I want to suggest three principles to serve as perspective regarding apparently unanswered prayers.

1. God provides for us and all our needs. God created us; we are his children. He loves us. He will give us what he thinks we need. All good parents can identify with this principle. St. Paul assures the Philippians, “God will supply your needs fully in a way worthy of his magnificent riches in Christ Jesus.” (4.19) St. Paul instructs the Romans, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray [and what to pray for] so the Spirit himself intercedes for us.” (8.26)

2. God does not provide everything that we think we need. Best example is Jesus’ plea in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father, if this cup can pass from me, let it do so. But not my will, but your will be done.” (Lk. 22.42) Another example is Job who lost his wife, children, property, and health. He trusts in God, and comments wisely, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1.21) With similar faith, Isaiah writes, “God’s ways are not our ways.” (55.8)

3. Mystery pervades all that God does. Mystery means that “a reality is so profound that we cannot possibly grasp it, hold it, control it, understand it. And as people with gray hair have learned the hard way when we finally thought we had seen it all, actually God still has surprises for us. God’s mysteries are like a moving target, “once you get there, there isn’t there anymore.” I know a family of famous athletes. After having given birth to three wonderful girls, the family became pregnant with a boy. Expectations were great for this child. “What will this child be?” Some few days after the birth,
doctors informed the parents that the boy was born with Downs Syndrome. The father’s elation plummeted to sadness. In my family, I can identify with this roller-coaster of emotions. The child’s mother and the three young girls responded most lovingly. In the midst of the father’s asking, “why, why, why,” the youngest girl, maybe seven years of age, explained, “Daddy, God gave us Baby James, because God knows that our family can give him all the love that he needs.” Out of the mouths of babes, we can all learn a great deal.

Another example. Last week, a very good friend died at age 59. His profession was an oral surgeon. He had just retired four months previously. Why does God do this? .... Meanwhile, I have an unmarried aunt who is 95. She prays all the time, “God, please take me.” Her parents, friends, and 90 year-old boyfriend have all predeceased her. She tells us that she sees her boyfriend beckoning her to come join him in heaven. She’s ready and willing to die. She does not understand why God does not take her. Last week, she fell in the bathtub and lay undiscovered for two whole days. Her aide rushed her to the hospital. My aunt suffered only a bruise on her right hand!! Now, she’s back home, praying, “God, please take me.” We encounter a lot of mysteries in life.

Personally, I believe that “all things work unto good for those who believe.” (Rom. 8.28) Also, I believe that God takes us when he wants us. Some people die after very short lives, and other people seem to be like cats that have nine lives. Ultimately, we are in God’s hands. God provides for us. But it appears that he doesn’t give us everything we want. There is much mystery in life. I want to conclude with a prayer which I keep in my wallet.

“I asked God for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak so that I might learn to obey. I asked God for health that I might do great things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked God for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked God for power that I might have approval. I was given weakness that I might feel the need for God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I received nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for. I am among all people, most richly blessed.”