

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
29 July 2018

2 Kings 4:42-44
Psalm 145
Ephesians 4:1-6
(Luke 7:16) John 6:1-15

Holy Family Café

Recall in the Gospel two weeks ago, Jesus gave His Apostles a kind of test. He sent them out two by two with nothing for the journey.¹ It was more than just a test to see if they would make it back alive or abandon their mission. It was a blessing for them – an *opportunity* for them to experience Divine Providence in action.²

Jesus offered His disciples these types of tests – these *opportunities* – from time to time. He commanded Peter to walk out to Him on the water.³ He invited the Rich Young Man to sell what he had and follow Him.⁴ He challenged the Canaanite Woman’s faith when He at first seemingly refused to heal her daughter.⁵ When we read these encounters, we might wonder, Why did Jesus “test” people’s faith? Didn’t He already know what was in their heart?⁶

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I’ve told this story once before, of how one of my seminary professors changed my attitude about tests. Back in seminary, we were, in many ways, like regular college students. Sometimes a little bit lazy and trying to get out of doing work. We complained about the reading assignments, papers, presentations, and exams that our professors assigned to us. We’d try to convince them to take it easy on us, give us days off, cancel assignments, etc. Thankfully, for our own benefit, these tactics rarely had any effect on our professors.

One semester, as we were preparing for our final exam in Scriptural Greek class, we started up again: “Come on, Doctor Ohm... Do we really *have* to take the final exam? Can’t we just cancel it?” Completely unaffected, she calmly said to us: “I don’t know why you’re

complaining about the final exam. You should be looking forward to it! This is your opportunity to show everything that you've learned this semester!" Not a test...an *opportunity!*

You know, she was absolutely right. She wasn't giving us this exam to trick us, fail us, or for her own entertainment. She wasn't particularly looking forward to reading through and grading a stack of poorly-translated Greek Scriptures. But it was her gift to us. She had been teaching us for a whole semester, and now she wanted us to recognize for ourselves how much we had learned. To strengthen our confidence – or to help us recognize where we might need to put in a little more work to get better.

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In today's Gospel, the *Multiplication of the Loaves*, Jesus once again gave His disciples a test.⁷ And when we hear the word "test", we must reject anything in us that has been conditioned to fear tests. Any notion that we might have that a test is meant to harm us or cause us distress. A test from Jesus is not meant to trick us or fail us or shame us. A test from Jesus is an *opportunity*. It's an opportunity to celebrate what we've learned from Him, and how He's helped us grow – or to become aware of areas that need some more work. Either way Jesus does it for our benefit – because He loves us.

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You'll notice yellow sheets in all the pews. Would you please pass them down the pew to one another? Don't worry – this is not a test! But, it *is* an *opportunity*. An opportunity to "take [your] next step in following Jesus" in a way that truly "[shares] the joy of the Gospel with others,"⁸ both fellow parishioners and visitors to our parish.

This weekend we are celebrating the amazing gift that Holy Family Café has been to our parish. Thank you to the hundreds of dedicated, faithful, and loving volunteers who have made

this happen for going on four years! I say “thank you” – not just as one of your priests – but also as one of your new parishioners.

It was one year ago this month that I arrived here at Holy Family Parish as your new priest. From the first Sunday – and every Sunday since – I have felt so much enthusiasm and loving support from all of you as you welcomed me. Thank you for helping me to feel comfortable and loved here in my new home!

The Café has been one of the best places for me, as a new member of the parish, to feel welcomed and loved. Yes, to enjoy some good food: fruit, eggs, yogurt, and the most important: donuts! But, even more importantly, to enjoy getting to know you all better. To have longer conversations. To catch up on what’s going on in one another’s lives. To have theological discussions. To play with the kids a little bit. To share how Jesus is blessing us. To become a part of the Holy Family *Family*.

There are many parts that come together to create this welcoming family environment at the Café. Little touches like: the friendly volunteer staff in Café aprons; the large umbrellas; the Café tablecloths; and the new table tents with Scripture. Tasks like: setting up the food; making the coffee; cleaning the dishes; and putting it all away at the end of the day.

All these thoughtful little touches and tasks add up to make a big impact. They make a place where old friends reconnect; where new friends feel welcome to meet; where people like to linger because they are so much enjoying being together. But all these little touches and tasks need a lot of people to come together to make it happen. More than that – they need Jesus to bring them together, transform a lot of small contributions, into the massive gift that happens each weekend. I think the Café leaders thank God for the “miracle” that happens each weekend when it all comes together so well!

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It was a great act of faith that started the Café three years ago. No one knew for sure how it would all work out. God blessed that act of faith – and continues to strengthen our faith through it each Sunday. But now the Café needs your help to continue being a blessing for our parish.

Many of our fellow parishioners have dedicated themselves to this ministry for three years. But over time, some people moved away, some people moved on to other ministries. The natural order for any ministry is that there comes a time for new leadership to step up.

If you're an existing volunteer, is Jesus calling you to take the next step by taking on a leadership role?

If you're a former volunteer, is Jesus calling you to step back in?

If you're looking for a ministry or are new to the parish, is Jesus calling you to step forward?

Please pray about filling out this yellow form. Volunteer positions in the Café are as little as a couple hours, one time every six weeks. Please stop by the table in the East Narthex to ask questions, or hand your yellow form to one of the Café volunteers wearing a Café apron.

And if you've discerned that Jesus is not calling you to this particular ministry – that's OK! The Café still needs you! We need you to come over to the Café after Mass and spend some time with you fellow parishioners. Take the opportunity to get to know one another. Please, head over to the Café today after Mass and introduce yourself to a new person.

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As we continue to pray as a parish about taking our next step in following Jesus – whether in Café Ministry or any ministry – let us ask the Holy Spirit to show us if there is anything preventing us taking the next step. Like the Apostle Philip, do we think that we don't have enough to offer? Maybe not enough time? Maybe not enough skills? Maybe not enough courage? Maybe we're just simply not sure if we can do it?

Before He multiplied the loaves and fishes, Jesus tested His Apostles: “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?”⁹ The test turned out to be an *opportunity* for them to learn that, even when we’re not sure if we have enough, when we bring the little we have to Jesus (think of the little boy with five loaves and two fish...¹⁰), He can transform it and make miracles happen.

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Jesus is giving all of us an *opportunity* today. Jesus is asking us: “Where can we make community happen at Holy Family Parish?” “Where can we welcome guests and new parishioners?” “Where can we put our faith into action?” “Where can we find enough people to make all this happen at Holy Family?”

The answer to these questions is right here among us. I’m confident that Jesus is calling many of you here to take this *opportunity* and *to take your next step*.

¹ Mark 6:8

² Recall from “Divine Providence”, Homily for Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, 15 July 2018: Pope John Paul II, at Fatima, 13 May 1982, “In the designs of [Divine] Providence, there are no mere coincidences.”

³ Matthew 14:28-31

⁴ Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22

⁵ Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

⁶ See Note for John 6:6 at usccb.org: “...in this gospel, Jesus is never portrayed as ignorant of anything.” For example, see John 2:24: “[Jesus] knew them all.”

⁷ John 6:6

⁸ *Holy Family Parish Prayer*

⁹ John 6:5

¹⁰ John 6:9; also see 2 Kings 4:42: “A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing the man of God twenty barley loaves made from the first fruits, and fresh grain in the ear.”