

Mark 6: 34 – 44, Thanksgiving, Oct. 11, 2009
Responding to God's Gifts and Grace

Thanksgiving can be a difficult time for all of us, no? What could be difficult about thanksgiving? After all, we are so very fortunate and we all wish to thank God – isn't that what Thanksgiving is about? How could giving thanks to our Creator be difficult?

I think that Thanksgiving can be difficult when we reflect on that radical word that is rarely used in this society – a word that frightens the power brokers in this society. ***Thanksgiving can be difficult when we contemplate the concept of "enough", and our response.***

One of the saints of our city, Mary Jo Leddy, tells a story about a conversation with a teenager from Africa who had arrived at Romero House, a shelter for refugees where Mary Jo lives her ministry.

The young woman had arrived on their doorstep with nothing more than an overnight bag. Mary Jo had welcomed her and shown her the bedroom which would be hers, and they were sitting in the kitchen at the back of the house having a cup of tea. The young woman had picked up an ability to speak some English in her long journey to North America.

At one point in the conversation the refugee woman asked, "Who live there?" while looking intently out the window.

Mary Jo responded that nobody lives out there – confident, just like most of us, that she knew what was happening in her back yard.

"No," insisted the young girl. "Person there. House there." She pointed in the direction of the backyard. "House there. Person there."¹

Mary Jo writes, "It was then that I saw. I saw the garage as if for the first time. The words fell from my mouth like stones.
IT. IS. A. HOUSE. FOR. A CAR.

In a time of a housing crisis in our neighbourhoods, in our city, in our nation, how is it that we have sufficient resources to provide housing for cars – and not for people?

Thanksgiving can be difficult when we contemplate the concept of "enough", and our response. Is ours an attitude of gratitude?

¹ "Radical Gratitude" by Mary Jo Leddy, page 15

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Jesus faced a similar situation when he asked his disciples to set the table for a huge crowd.

Their first reaction was based on the concept of scarcity – look at all those people; look at how little we have! It would take two hundred denarii of food to feed this crowd. Get serious Jesus – this is isn't a pot luck dinner at church!!

They had forgotten the promise that God made through the prophet Joel:

*"You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you."²*

Jesus, in contrast to his ancient and some of his modern day disciples, responded from a much deeper place, knowing that God has provided what we need. Jesus knew that God has provided enough for all. What we often regard as shortages are simply a distribution problem.

Jesus asked them to count what they had, and the disciples discovered that they had five loaves (it turns out that that was one loaf of bread per thousand people). Even the most productive UCW unit would probably feel challenged in this situation.

Jesus, however, as he usually does, responded from a much deeper place, knowing that God has provided what we need. He took the bread and THANKED GOD! He blessed the bread, and the two fish, broke them into pieces, and asked the disciples to feed the 5,000 people.

I don't know about you, but I hear an echo of communion in this story.

"And all ate and were filled; and they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish."³

It must have been a difficult lesson for those who surrounded Jesus, and who said that there wasn't enough food for the crowd surrounding them. ***Thanksgiving can be difficult when we contemplate the concept of "enough", and our response.***

The Globe & Mail has a very gifted cartoonist on staff and his work appears on the editorial page. He signs his creations simply, "Gable."

² Joel 2:26

³ Mark 6: 42, 43

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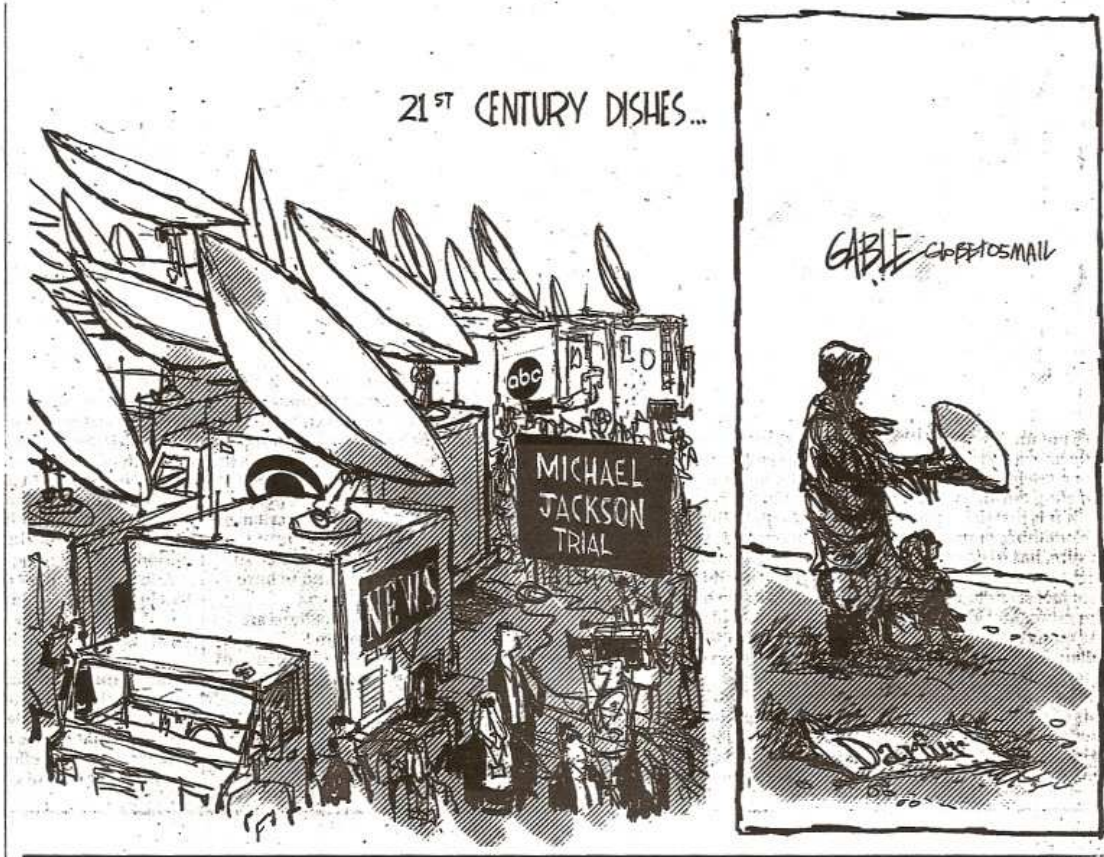
In the early spring of 2005 he produced a cartoon that I believe captures the essential irony of our time – a fascination with the lives of the rich and famous and a denial of the growing gap between the few and most of God's children. Our televisions have hours devoted to the preparation of food, and advertisements for weight reduction clinics, while even in this affluent city people are going hungry.

Some of our homes have satellite "dishes" pointed to the sky to capture the stories of the rich and famous, and those dishes could also be showing us stories of how loaves and fish are being distributed.

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The Irish rock star Bono, when he was speaking to the Liberal leadership convention in Toronto in 2003 said this about hunger:

"If we really deep down believe that Africans are equal to us, we wouldn't allow this to happen."

I think that Thanksgiving can be difficult when we reflect on that radical word that is rarely used in this society – a word that frightens the power brokers in this society. ***Thanksgiving can be difficult when we contemplate the concept of "enough", and our response.***

The power brokers in a system of Empire want us to focus on the Rich & Famous, lest our hearts go out to the people of Darfur, Ethiopia, Somalia, Regent Park, Jane-Finch, Warden Woods, etcetera. They want us to believe that we live in a world of scarcity, NOT a world where there is ENOUGH FOR ALL.

How do we, as people who attempt to follow the Way of Jesus, respond?

One way is to challenge the concept of scarcity through simply using the word "ENOUGH." If we use this word, it will become a part of who we are, and how we live. It will become a part of our way of thinking, and those around us will be influenced in a positive manner as we take our loaves and fish and SHARE in a culture devoted to GREED.

Mary Jo Leddy writes: **"Our lives are directed by the stories we choose to dwell on and in."**⁴

If we begin to live as if there is enough for us, and for everyone else, we begin to model the parable of Jesus feeding everyone, and our actions become the gospel lesson for others. Our lives, and the lives of people around us become transformed.

I once encountered a woman who had a principle for her life of living simply – and, as a retired English teacher, she struggled with what the word "simply" meant. For her a purchase of art (that she adored), or a southern vacation, or a trip to the Shaw Festival were all extravagances. We talked about this several times. Her solution was to give thanks. She decided to give thanks by making a donation to others each time that she found herself indulging in an "extravagant act." Her life was transformed as she gave up a sense of guilt and lived one of thanksgiving.

"Our lives are directed by the stories we choose to dwell on and in."⁵

⁴ "Radical Gratitude", Mary Jo Leddy, page 50

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I believe that is why the early Christian community wrote down the story of Jesus challenging the disciples to share five loaves and two fish with 5,000 people. They could transform their lives through demonstrating that there is ENOUGH FOR ALL.

As you may know, Robert F. Kennedy is one of my heroes in life for we was, "An Apostle of Change."⁶ Kennedy said:

"If we fail to dare, if we do not try, the next generation will harvest the fruit of our indifference; a world we did not want – a world we did not choose – but a world we could have made better, by caring more for the results of our labors."⁷

Yes, I think that Thanksgiving can be difficult when we reflect on that radical word that is rarely used in this society – a word that frightens the power brokers in this society. ***Thanksgiving can be difficult when we contemplate the concept of "enough", and our response.***

Insert - PowerPoint image of quotation from Mark 6: 42, 43

"And all ate and were filled; and they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand."

Hymn # 539 – God of All Good

⁵ "Radical Gratitude", Mary Jo Leddy, page 50

⁶ "Robert F. Kennedy: Apostle of Change", Pocket Books, 1968.

⁷ Apostle of Change, page 17