

**EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (8/2-3/2008)**

*Isaiah 55/1-3, Psalm 145, Romans 8/35-39, Matthew 14/13-21*

The Olympic Games begin this week in Beijing, China.

Athletes (hopefully free of drugs!) of all ages from across the world will gather to pit their strengths and talents against each other hoping to earn a gold, silver or bronze medal.

It's always an exciting time for anyone interested in sports.

The phrase "the ecstasy of victory and the agony of defeat" will be oft repeated this August.

But what do the games prove when all is said and done?

Nothing much, although there are many people who try to measure the power or prestige of a particular country by the number of medals its athletes bring home.

Within a short time, even the major events of the games will be history, nothing more.

In contrast, an event took place 2000 years ago that continues to draw our attention and our scrutiny to this very day.

At the time, it may have gone unnoticed except by the people involved.

Jesus catered a meal for 5000 people, more than that if you count the women and children.

It was just one meal - one picnic outdoors as it were - and then those who had been fed returned to their respective towns and villages.

What made the event so notable was that the meal began with only five barley loaves and two fish; the bread and fish constituted the full menu on that spring day in Galilee.

After the unexpected meal, Jesus' companions gathered up the leftovers, filling twelve baskets, presumably enough for a late evening snack.

All four of the Gospels record the story of this meal so it must have made a great impression on those first-century followers of Jesus, as it surely does on us as well.

What actually happened that afternoon on the mountainside?

We don't know for sure, except that a rather large group of hungry people were fed from

a very meager larder; and Jesus was at the center of it.

The explanation has been put forward that, after an anonymous donor volunteered the five loaves and two fish to Jesus, others also stepped forward in imitation of that generosity.

The text doesn't go along with that.

It simply says: "*He (Jesus) took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed and broke them and gave the loaves to the disciples who, in turn, gave them to the people. All those present ate their fill.*"

This scene does not lend itself to a logical explanation, and the New Testament authors do nothing to clear up the mystery.

It's as if the Bible is saying: "There you have it; figure it out for yourself."

If what really happened was that the generosity of a few motivated others to bring forth their extra food, that would be a great example for all of us to share out food with the poor.

But, out of compassion for the multitude, it was Jesus who fed the people. Period.

It's what God does for us according to Isaiah: "*All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come and receive grain and eat.*"

But God, through Jesus, once again takes note of what we need and provides for us.

That's a reality, not just a memory, that will go on forever.