

At the risk of making enemies, let me tell you, I have never been a supporter of the state lottery. It's legal. It's popular. People feel free to do what they want with their money. I just wish people would choose something charitable to do with disposable income. When legalized gambling increases, donations to not-for-profits go down. Sometimes people tell me, "Father, if I win the lottery, you're gonna have enough money to build a new church." I figure if people would take the money they spend on the lottery each month and give it to the church instead, we'd be way ahead of where we are waiting for that big jackpot. I tell people, "If you've got \$5 in your pocket that you don't need, you can do three things with it: You can buy lottery tickets. You can give it to me. Or you can set fire to it. The net result to your pocket will be the same. So if you would just give it to me, God will reward your kindness and I'll come out 5 bucks ahead." No one is ever converted by this argument, but it makes perfect sense to me.

Seriously, we all get tempted to say, "I'll start being generous once I have a little extra. Once my income goes up, I can start giving to charity. Once I get a little extra time, I can start volunteering." We think of generosity as something we do after we get our surplus. Today's readings turn it the other way around. Once people become generous with what little they have, they get the surplus they long for.

You know the story of Jesus, the loaves and the fish. Less well known is today's first reading. Elisha was a prophet in Israel in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. He is remembered for his wisdom and the wonders he worked. He served nationally as a kind of defense adviser to the king, and he helped individuals as in today's reading. One of the prophet's admirers brings him some bread baked from newly harvested barley. The prophet looks at the crowd of 100 people around him, and tells his servant to feed them. The servant objects because the food is so little, but Elisha insists. Sure enough, there is plenty to eat. The prophet speaks these words from God: "They shall eat and there shall be some left over." And so there was.

God will find a way to provide for our needs. God will send prophets to speak wisdom to our hearts. God will supply food when we are hungry. And when we share even the little we have of our time or our resources, God will make it go farther than we could imagine. Generosity is not reserved for those who have plenty; it is the right way of life for those who have little.