READINGS: 2 Kings 4:42-44/ Ephesians 4:1-6 / John 6:1-15
**Theme:** **Beyond Our Expectations and Imaginations**
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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The Holy Scripture praises God for being “**able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**” (Ephesians 3:20). Indeed, God can do far more than we expect or can imagine! A few instances of God providing more than expected or imagined are given in the first and gospel readings.

In the first case, the man from Baal-Shalishah thought that the hundred men needed more than twenty barley loaves (each smaller than the size of the fist of an average adult) to be satisfied. However, Elisha, the man of God, thought otherwise. Believing in the infinite power of his God, Elisha insisted: "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: 'They will eat and have some left over'" (2 Kings 4:43). When the man eventually obeyed Elisha, his expectation as well as that of the hundred men were exceeded (2 Kings 4:44).

If the ratio of 20 (small loaves) to 100 (men) was surprising enough, then John the Evangelist says that we are yet to see the “exceeding” work of God. John, thus, tells us of the event of the ratio of 5 (loaves) to 5,000 (people) [John 6:1-15]. While the apostle Philip says that even the annual salary of a labourer will not be sufficient to buy enough food for each of the 5,000 people to have a little bite, Jesus already has the answer: God “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think”. Furthermore, when another apostle, Andrew, sees the 5 loaves as a drop in the ocean of 5,000 hungry adult stomachs, Jesus demonstrates the “beyond expectation” provision of God: all are satisfied and there are some leftovers!

Beloved, even today God is still providing beyond our expectations and imaginations. For instance, after 12 long years of waiting for a child, an expectant woman delivered not just a child but twins. Another instance: after spending the last week of lectures and the revision week in the hospital and expecting an average performance in his exams, a student topped his class in that particular semester. Let me add a third instance: a man was told that he would not survive beyond 5 years after he was diagnosed of a bone marrow disease in 1988. However, the good news is that God has exceedingly prolonged his life. That man is still alive and aging gracefully!

Beloved, when the crowd of Jews experienced the mind-blowing provision of Jesus, they sought more material blessings from him. But then he took the occasion to teach them to look beyond the provision of bread and catch a glimpse of the exceedingly more rewarding spiritual blessings that God is offering humankind (*cf*. next Sunday’s gospel reading). Therefore, beloved, over and above what God may pleasantly surprise us with in this life, let us always appreciate and seek first the “beyond our expectations and imagination” eternal joy that he has in store for all his faithful ones. Amen!