

offering, in view of the great crowd. They cannot see any way to balance this equation. Despite all of the evidence they have seen – the healings, the changing of water into wine, the storms being calmed – they don't realize Who they are dealing with.

Five loaves and two fishes are a meager amount of food. That wouldn't even begin to feed our congregation at coffee hour. It wouldn't even take the edge off the hunger of the people in one row at our parish.

But in the hands of Jesus, five loaves and two fishes is just enough. In fact, it is *more* than enough. Every need is overwhelmingly met! Jesus demonstrates God's extravagant generosity and grace – twelve baskets of leftovers were collected! Jesus' provision completely annihilates the need.

Conclusion

This account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of this immense multitude has great application for us today, which is the reason this story is told and re-told so often in the life of the Church. We, too, face seemingly insurmountable challenges. We live at a time when our politics are polarized, our economy is in a shambles, and our culture is collapsing around us. There seems to be no solution to the great problems of the day.

We, too, have meager gifts to offer. We are ordinary people with ordinary talents. There seems to be no relationship between what we can accomplish and what needs to be done. What we offer seems so inadequate.

But in the hands of the Master, ordinary means can be used to accomplish extraordinary ends. In the hands of Jesus, a handful of food can feed a multitude of people. In the hands of Jesus, ordinary water becomes exceptional wine. In the hands of Jesus, the lives of uneducated fishermen can be used to "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17) – twenty centuries later we still feel the effects!

Our "loaves and fishes" are our lives. We can't make them useful on our own. They only become useful in the hands of Jesus. In His hands, our ordinary lives can become the instruments of His will. We must surrender our "loaves and fishes" to Him and He will use them to work His miracles.

Every day we must ask ourselves this question: Have I offered Him my loaves and fishes today?



Loaves and Fishes

“In the hands of the Master,
ordinary means can be used to
accomplish extraordinary ends.”

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 14:14-22

[At that time, as Jesus] went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

Introduction

Often, when families and friends get together, favorite old stories will come up. Someone begins, "Do you remember when ..." and people either groan or chuckle, depending on the story or the storyteller. The same anecdotes seem to be told again and again. In my own family, these stories abound. One of my favorite family stories is the time my grandfather and his brothers, who were legendary pranksters, tiptoed one of the family horses up the stairs to the second floor parlor on a sleepy Sunday afternoon while their father was taking a nap. It turns out that taking a horse up a flight of stairs is not really the hard part; it is coaxing him back down again that is a challenge!

The family of God is no different from any other family. When the Church gathers, Her favorite accounts of the Lord and His Apostles are told and retold. The account of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 is one of those old favorites and it was told over and over again in the life of the early Church. In fact, it is such a favorite that it is the only of Christ's miracles that is recounted in all four Gospels. This morning we have heard St. Matthew's account of this event.

Context

If we look a little further up in Matthew 14 we can see some context for this great miracle of the feeding of the multitude. John the Baptist had been arrested killed by Herod Antipas. John, of course, was Jesus' cousin and he had a public ministry that was very effective – he was the one people turned to for moral guidance and religious inspiration. In fact, it is probably not an overstatement to say that John was the most visible moral and spiritual force in Israel at that time. He was the greatest prophet in the land for over 400 years. He was not afraid to openly call powerful people to account and this made him popular with the common people.

John preached publicly and loudly against immorality, but he particularly spoke out against Herod's incestuous relationship with his brother Philip's wife. Herod eventually decided to take action against this troublemaker. He had John arrested and, despite being concerned about the popular reaction, Herod eventually had John beheaded. Problem solved, right? The people were stunned and shocked at the loss of their beloved prophet. This was a great tragedy. And it is in this context that Jesus began His public ministry.

Jesus' popularity with the people began to increase, filling the void left by John's death. He began traveling around the countryside, preaching and healing the sick, telling people how they should live. As His popularity increased, He began to draw massive crowds of people. And this catches Herod's eye. "Oh, no," he thought. "Another prophet troublemaker; another John the Baptist."

Jesus knows that the time for His passion has not yet come so he departed the region by boat, trying to get to a lonely place away from the crowds. But the people followed his boat along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and when He landed, He was met by a huge crowd, about 5,000 men, St. Matthew records, plus their women and children.

Loaves and Fishes

Even though Jesus' plan was to spend some time alone, He was not irritated or frustrated by the appearance of the multitude. Instead, He looked on them with compassion. They were a flock without a shepherd and He spent the day teaching them and healing their sick.

As the day came to an end, the disciples approached Jesus and suggested that He send the crowds away so they can get something to eat. But Jesus had another idea. "You give them something to eat," He said.

"But, Master, we have only five loaves of bread and two fishes," they reply.

"Bring them here to Me."

Jesus told people to sit on the grass, then He took the loaves and fishes, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to His disciples to distribute to the people. Everyone ate their fill and there were twelve baskets of leftovers!

In this account the disciples were faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem: the day is late, the crowd is enormous, they are in the middle of nowhere, and there is only a meager, tiny amount of food – a ridiculously small