

Matthew 14:17-21, Jesus feeds the 5000

We read this text and focus on the fact that Jesus fed the 5000 from just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes. Many homilies talk about the giving of Jesus, the compassion and consideration Jesus had. Some homilies point to the meagre bit of food and compare this with the 12 baskets of scraps collected afterwards. There is so much that we can draw out of this text.

But the narrative does not start with feeding the 5000, it starts with a real tragedy. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, is beheaded by Herod, at the whim of his vindictive wife. So futile, such madness, a bloody-minded act, just because a king had to keep his pride; so, John was brutally murdered. This must have been so painful for Jesus, and so many what if's must have gone through his mind. Is it any wonder he went off to a deserted place to find some peace and quiet?

Though he went away, the people still knew where he went, and they must have travelled some distance to get to him. They sought Jesus for healing. When they found him, he not only healed them, but he fed them as well. Where is Jesus today, what if we feel Jesus seems to be in a far-off place? Do we seek him and not give up, is there a longing for his presence; knowing that when we draw near to Him we will know that there is wholeness in our lives and knowing that His presence feeds us with assurance that his compassion reaches us.

Jesus went into a deserted place; deserted means that nobody was there. He went to be by himself. Have you ever wondered why? With the news of John's death, he must have been grieving. We have all been there, sad or tragic news makes us want to retreat somewhere quiet to collect our thoughts or to perhaps cry through the pain. Most times we just want to be left alone. We sometimes forget that, though Jesus was divine, he was also very human, and emotions are all a part of this. He cried when hearing that Lazarus died. This time the death was close, John was family.

We see that a crowd of 5000 had found him and gathered, all seeking Jesus for some reason and many for healing. It says Jesus took compassion on them and so began to heal the sick; it took some time because it was becoming evening. Think of this; Jesus must have walked through the crowd and ministered to the people's needs individually. This took time and no-one had eaten. The disciples wanted to send them off so that they could find food for themselves. Jesus said no, you feed them, and so we see the story of the five loaves and the two fish.

Now, we need to back-track a bit in this story. Do you remember? Jesus escaped to be by himself. But he ended up ministering to people throughout the day. The significance in this story is not that a miracle happened. But out of Jesus' own pain he healed the people, and out of his own pain he fed them into the evening.

It foretells of the cross; Jesus through his own pain brought healing for all who would come to him and, out of his pain, Jesus says "Feed on me", meaning, partake of what I have to offer you. His compassion was such that he put his own grief aside for our needs. That grief was so much so, that the gospel says that facing his death for us, he sweated drops of blood. Then, facing the fact that in a moment he would be separated from His Father, he prays if there be any other way, but your will be done. And, sadly, some just want Jesus to find them a car park at the shopping centre, and that is as close as they will ever get.

He came into this world with God's compassion for all humanity embracing us, healing us not only from our sicknesses but from our inner wounds as well. And he is the bread of life which gives us a new life and a new hope. Once upon a time, 5000 people drew near to Jesus and he drew near to them. In James 4:8, it says draw near to God and he will draw near to you; in Hebrews 7:18, it says a better hope is introduced (Jesus our high Priest) by which we draw near to God, and in Hebrews 10:19-23, these beautiful words say *Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way opened for us through the curtain of His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold resolutely to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.*

Today, we who draw near to God are dwelling a living miracle, where hundreds of thousands of people are fed by him. We no longer have to strive to be good enough for God. He drew near to us, He healed us, He feeds us, and he loves us, just as we are, from the day we drew near to Him and told him that we needed him.