

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The fact that the telling of this feeding of the multitude occurs a total of six times in all four Gospels, which we believe is the revealed Word of God, certainly suggests that God wants us to hear intently what He is telling us.

First we're told that Jesus, upon hearing of the death of John the Baptist, wanted to get away by himself. Besides being his cousin, John the Baptist was also his hero. He tells his disciples that "no man born of a woman was greater than John the Baptist". Jesus was distraught. He was grieving. He needed to be alone.

But it was not to be. The Gospel tells us, "The crowds...followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked..." they were there, thousands of them. He could have seen them coming and pulled away from the shore. He could have excused Himself. He had His own problems; His own heartbreak; His own cares, anxieties, and worries. He could have said, "Leave me alone." Or, "I don't want to be bothered" Or, "I'm going to sit this one out."

How often have we done just that, gotten so caught up in our own needs or emotional baggage that we just don't want to be bothered by the wants or needs or expectations others have on us? How often have we excused ourselves from helping or serving or caring because we're so caught up in ourselves?

But, No! Not Jesus! Even in His sadness, in His sorrow, dare I say, in his brokenness, the Gospel tells us, "his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick." Now, this apparently went on all day into the evening. Broken, grieving, tired, worn out though he was, the compassionate heart of Jesus kept ministering to thousands of people in their sickness, fear, and heartache. Doesn't this speak to us of God's never-ending compassion--- that is His willingness to enter into our suffering too? And aren't we called to be compassionate "as our heavenly Father is compassionate"?

The disciples then recognize the hunger in this vast throng of people. They see an overwhelming physical need. They can't imagine how it can be met. There just aren't enough resources to meet this terrible need. They turn to Jesus and basically say, "Make them go away. We can't stand to see such terrible need." "Tell them to go, take care of themselves." Jesus responds, "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." It seems the Lord is demanding the impossible of them. Can't you see the shock on their faces. What is He asking of us?

How often have you felt that God is asking the impossible of you? You simply don't have the means to do the work that God is calling you to do. You don't have the time, the talents, or the money to do what it seems God wants of you. All you have is a little bit—barely enough for yourself and your family.

The question, of course, for many of us is, “How do I know what God wants me to do?” In a sense it was easy for the disciples. They had thousands of hungry people staring them in the face. They felt compassion for them. That’s a good place to start—what are you passionate about? What do you have a gift for? Where is your sense of justice offended? What would you like to do to make this world a better place; to improve life in our community; to build up our parish community? Then, what resources, no matter how meager, are available to address the issue? Are there others in the community of faithful who share your passion? Then, it’s time to come together with them and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pray, asking God, to make it apparent this is what He wants, not just what you want. Then, offer yourself and your resources to those in authority responsible for this work of God in the world.

Here in the Church we have all kinds of services and ministries that we need you for. Which speaks to your heart? What resources can you provide? Pray, asking for guidance, listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit, then make yourself available.

Jesus says, “Show me what you have.” As He said elsewhere in the Gospels, “Nothing is impossible for God.” “Here, give me the little that you have and watch what I can do with it.” That’s really all God asks of us. That we give what we have of ourselves—our time, our talents, and our treasure--so that He can accomplish what He wants to do through us.

And what happens when we make ourselves and what we have available to the Lord? This is the best part of the miracle of the loaves and the fish, “They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full”—after the thousands had eaten.

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, what this Gospel event God tells us over and over and over again in His Revealed Word is that He not only will provide for our needs, but provide an excessive abundance if we give Him “all that we have” to accomplish what He asks us to do. God simply asks us to trust Him with the resources we have, no matter how great or how small, so that we can do His work here on earth. This miracle of the loaves and fish shows us that in His compassionate love He will never be outdone in generosity.

The Psalmist sings it so beautifully for us today:

“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.”

As He has done for us, so are we to do for others.