

**9 Pentecost
July 25, 2021**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

There are two very familiar stories in today's Gospel. I would like to spend our time together considering the story of the feeding of the 5000. But first, a few words about the second story about Jesus getting into the boat with his disciples out at sea. I hope that we will have heard clearly that in times of trouble, Jesus also says to us, his disciples today, as he did to his disciples of old...BE NOT AFRAID. IT IS I. He does not merely offer words of assurance from a distance...he gets into our boat with us. And he reminds us that We are not alone. He is with us. Be not afraid! The calming of the storm is not merely the stopping of the winds; it is about knowing that God, through Jesus, and the Power of the Holy Spirit REALLY does enter into our midst and will never forsake us. Having Jesus with us, the stormy waters are stilled. Hold on to that. If we can learn to let go into the promises of Jesus, the wonders will never cease.

This is what the Incarnation is all about...that God in Jesus came to dwell among us... comes right into the midst of life's situations and enters into them with us. He gets into our boats. Be not afraid; the Lord is with you. Certainly a very powerful message for us to ponder, especially if we seem to be struggling against the wind.

But now---let's turn from that Good News to the first story told in today's Gospel.

I'll begin with a word from Yogi Berra:

Yogi Berra, the great baseball player of an earlier age, was known for his unusual and shall we say, creative use of the English language. Giving directions to his home, for example, he would say, "When you come to the fork in the road, take it." His formula for success was stated as, "ninety percent perspiration and the rest mostly just plain hard work." Then there was the time he went to a pizzeria by himself and ordered a large pizza. The waitress asked if he would like it cut into four pieces or eight pieces. "Better make it four," he said. "I'm not hungry enough to eat eight pieces."////////Well, maybe Yogi Berra didn't have it right about cutting up a pizza, but certainly those who followed Jesus into the Galilean hills were very pleased that Jesus was able to cut five loaves and two fish into enough pieces to feed a huge crowd.

Little children can sometimes teach us lessons that stay with us for a long time. I had that experience some years ago when a little girl in the parish was about to receive communion for the first time. I asked her what her favorite Bible story was, and she said that best of all she liked the story of Jesus getting the people to share their lunch. It took me a minute to realize that she was referring to the story we read today, more commonly known as the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. One way to approach this story is to discuss what really happened. But another would be to reflect on what possible lessons the Holy Spirit is holding out to us through this story.

Certainly God working through Jesus could make as many loaves and fish as needed. Regardless of how he did it, this would not be the first time that God provided food for hungry people. Long before this miracle took place on a hillside in Galilee, Moses and his people were near a hillside named Sinai, when they were miraculously fed with manna in the desert. To this day we speak of manna from heaven when

it is any kind of divine aid that seems to appear out of nowhere. Realistically, more often than not though, God feeds his people through the generosity of people just like ourselves.

Obviously, food is a very big part of our lives. Indeed, hunger of one kind or another can force us to make very poor choices. Too often we just want to feel good. But...when you think of it...we probably don't NEED all that we have, all that makes us feel good...we probably DON'T need all that. Our son supports an orphanage in Kenya for children whose parents have died of AIDS. One year we were privileged to visit that orphanage with him and then could readily understand why he felt so committed to what they were doing there to give life to about 100 children. For one thing, the feeling of the orphanage is one of joy, mirth even, and sharing. Most memorable for me is their motto, which is: "ALL I NEED is enough, and ENOUGH is all I need!" They have found the true meaning of the prayer for daily bread. ALL I NEED IS ENOUGH, and ENOUGH IS ALL I NEED.

Feeding and sharing have gone together for a long time. In fact, in long ago days, they were an integral part of the commandment of hospitality. It is possible that the five loaves and two fish were all the disciples knew to be present. But, what if there were others who had brought their lunch? And they were inspired to share whatever they had? Also, I was thinking: 5 loaves and 2 fish... 5 and 2 make for an interesting possibility. They add up to seven, the Biblical number for perfection, for completion, for sufficiency. And, add to that, God usually enters the picture of the human condition when people are willing to share their lunch, so to speak. Share what they have.

Many of us have experienced how open hearts often create the realization that there IS enough for everyone. Perhaps a greater miracle than making many loaves out of five or many fish out of two, would be to open the hearts of those who had food, to share it with those who had none. Certainly, changing hearts is at least as miraculous as multiplying loaves. The same Jesus who fed the hungry on the hillside also told us that when we feed the hungry, we are feeding him, our very Lord. Remember how he said that when we have done this for the least of these, we have done it unto him?

We have ALL been in need of food from time to time. We may not have starved for food for the stomach, though that too is possible. But it is good to remember that in one way or another we have been hungry in other ways: hungry for someone to care, someone to listen, someone to lend a hand, hungry for affection, just kind of lonely, maybe a bit fearful. But, also how often it is that there is some human being who nourished us. Almost like an angel appeared at just the right time. In other words, people who have shared with us and eased our lot.///// And...Perhaps we are just now among those who have both loaves and fish. We have enough, perhaps much more than enough. But, let's be sure to consider this Gospel message in terms of MANY kinds of needs, MANY forms of hunger.

God in Jesus is asking that we share what we have in every way we can. THEN He can increase that beyond our wildest imagination. And, he assures us that in the process we will not be wanting. But rather, we will be feeding our own souls as we reach out to meet the needs of others. It is not a question of what people have earned or deserve; it IS a question of what God has called US to do and to be.////

Actually, there is a bit of a paradox in this story. Not only are we the people with the loaves and fish to share; we are also the crowd that is hungry. Jesus looked at the crowd... and he knew... they needed something to eat. He looks at us and knows our need for something more,... even if we are not aware of it. Jesus, who invited the crowd to sit on the grass and be fed, invites us also. He wants to feed our

souls. He calls us to offer up our feelings of hurt and woundedness, of discouragement and sadness...so that he can fill us with true food for the soul...with goodness and love, and peace within.

There is tremendous imagery in this story of the feeding of the 5000 that is a prelude to our Holy Communion. Just as the story would have turned out differently if no one would share, it certainly would have turned out differently if the people to be fed had said they were too busy to stay, that they had things to do, that they were quite satisfied with things as they were. In order to be fed, we need to realize that we need what is being offered. And, that is realizing that nothing is more important than being well nourished spiritually.

Much is being made right now of the lack of nutrition in junk food. Is it possible that we often feed ourselves with junk food for the soul? And then, as with junk food, we think we are filled, but we are somehow strangely still hungry? So then how can we enrich our lives spiritually if we think we have no need for the rich food our Lord offers?

Whether we interpret the story as about Jesus getting people to share their lunch, or whether we prefer to take it another way, the message remains the same: We have more than we need and we CAN afford to share. BUT at the same time, WE are being invited to sit down and BE fed. We are being called to respond with hearts that are open to feed others, but also, we're being invited to come and to BE fed; to nourish---Yes...but also to BE nourished. ////////// In our Gospel story, Jesus knew that the people needed a shepherd, someone to help with their needs. He knows we do too.

Another powerful message for us to ponder:

That from this day forward, we need to be truly intentional about our need for soul food! And as well, truly ever mindful of the needs of others, knowing that "all I need is enough and enough is all I need."

AMEN