

Today we remember one of Jesus' greatest miracles, the feeding of the 5000, an important story we see recorded in all four gospels. One of the Greek words for Miracle is "Semeion" (say-mee-on) which translates to "Sign." Think of each miracle as a road sign that points to heaven. How does Jesus use THIS miracle to guide his disciples and his Church to His heavenly kingdom?

In our gospel, a large congregation of men and their families are listening to Jesus in a deserted place. As the day shifts to evening, the disciples are concerned about people going hungry. They suggest Jesus ends his sermon to allow the people to go to the villages and buy food.

But Jesus disagrees with their approach, perhaps thinking, why should they end their spiritual meal to seek a physical meal? So, He tells the disciples, "Give them some food yourselves." Jesus is teaching a lesson that is known in corporate culture as "Being the change you seek." In a video, a software company employee describes it as, "Encouraging people to take the initiative to do whatever they see needs to be improved around them." This idea moves us from just putting up with or complaining about a problem, to engaging our minds and hearts in solving it.

Picking up on the same miracle described slightly differently in John's gospel, Andrew tells Jesus, "There is a boy here with five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many?" But this is exactly what Jesus has been looking for, because it allows Him to teach them a second lesson, to bring their gifts to Him to be multiplied. He says to the disciples, "Bring [the boy's loaves and fishes] to me."

Then, looking to his heavenly Father, Jesus says the blessing, breaks the loaves, multiplies them, and gives them to His disciples." After the multiplication the result goes BACK to the disciples to continue solving the problem for themselves. Jesus doesn't want to take over the whole operation, He wants to work WITH US to help those in need. We bring the problems and our humble gifts to Jesus, to let him multiply our efforts so we can deliver the solution wherever it is needed.

For another biblical example of how Jesus multiplies what we bring, think of the Wedding at Cana. The servers bring the ceremonial water jars and fill them with water, Jesus converts the water into 150 gallons of wine, and then gives it BACK to them to serve to the wedding party. Jesus does his work so much behind the scenes, that even the headwaiter isn't aware of the miracle.

For a modern-day example of Jesus as a multiplier, consider Mother Teresa. In 1950, she observes the problem of extreme poverty in Calcutta and begins to serve the poor.

The Lord multiplies her efforts over time, and her work turns into a religious order with over 5,000 sisters in 138 countries, running 750 missions and homes for the vulnerable. Here at St James, we too see Jesus multiplying our small gifts. In our music ministry individual voices are joined into choirs and multiplied into a whole congregation worshipping with song. Our cottage build project brings together strangers who become friends as they multiply their efforts giving up their Saturdays to create housing for the homeless.

We all face obstacles in our lives and communities. These can be triggered by everything from having a bad day, to landing unexpectedly in the hospital, becoming unemployed, or even facing the death of a loved one. Jesus is there to multiply our faith and give us the necessary grace to endure our trials. St Augustine wrote, "What grace is meant to do is to help good people, not to escape their sufferings, but to bear them with a stout heart, with a fortitude that finds its strength in faith."

This reminds us of St. Paul's faith, expressed in the second reading. He says, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us." We need to remind ourselves that all the challenges of our lives are not faced alone, but with the help of our loving God.

Irish priest, Fr. Conor Donnelly, points out that the feeding of the 5000 shows both the power of Our Lord, and at the same time, His compassion for His people. Fr. Donnelly says, "Jesus realizes they are hungry. He needs to look after their needs. This great sign foretells what will be the great memorial of His Sacrifice: the Mass, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, offered up for the salvation of the world." Jesus continues to look after us with this same compassion and is present in our Eucharist today.

If you suffer, bring your struggle to Jesus for His multitude of graces to help you cope in your darkness. If you know someone who suffers, prayerfully listen to how Jesus is calling you, like He does the disciples to, "Give them some of YOUR food" or other resources to help them in their need. Like Mother Teresa, your efforts will be multiplied and given back to you.

The miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 encourages us to be like the disciples, aware of the needs around us and to bring our small gift like the young boy to the Lord. We ask for faith in times of despair and for Jesus's help to multiply our efforts, so in the end, we can all help each other build his kingdom on earth.