

*John 6: 1-21*     *Ephesians 3: 14-21*

The story of the feeding of the 5000 is recorded in all 4 Gospels, making it one of the most recorded miracles of Jesus. In today's reading from John, Jesus climbs up a mountain and sits down with his disciples. A crowd makes its way up to listen to him. Jesus perceives their physical needs when they reach him and uses the occasion in a characteristic way by posing an awkward question to Philip, and by enlisting the help of others to work with him to relieve human need.

The miraculous feeding of the five thousand reveals a good deal about Jesus and his mission - and offers his followers some useful advice. But why did Jesus see the feeding of the crowd as his problem rather than the responsibility of the crowd.

First, there is his compassion. He sees the hunger of the people who had been following him for some considerable time. He cared deeply about them, knowing how hungry they were, not only physically but also spiritually. It would have been easy to say, "There are too many of them; how can we be expected to feed them?" but, of course, Jesus has compassion, and his heart goes out to them.

Then, there's his challenge to Philip, "Where can we buy bread?" this must have been quite a daunting question, as Philip looked at the crowd, before estimating that it would take about 6 months wages to raise enough money to buy bread to feed all these people..

Jesus was challenging Philip and the other disciples to look at their resources and their potential. Though our resources may be small, in God's hands they can be greatly transformed. Andrew seems to rise to the occasion, by saying, "There's a young lad here who has 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. But what's that among so many?" Set against the resources, the need seems way beyond the means to satisfy it.

Don't we often wonder if our small efforts can really make any difference? Like the disciples, we can be paralysed by the scale of human need. Well, here we learn that our efforts can indeed make a difference. Surprising things can happen when we set out on major projects with what we might regard as scant resources - mere crumbs. We've only to look at the way in which food banks have developed, as charities and churches attempt to meet the needs of the hungry.

We have become increasingly aware that physical hunger can be part of a cycle of deprivation which affects our health, education, life chances, career prospects and, ultimately personal fulfilment. Its often been said that "You can't hear the Gospel on an empty stomach." The unmet condition of hunger, then, also turns out to be a theological issue.

God's goodness and faithfulness, indeed his very reality, is put in doubt in the minds of many who battle daily with the curse of hunger and poverty. So we ourselves are enlisted to work with God so that, through us, God's promise to "fill the hungry with good things" can be realised.

Then thirdly, there's the clear command of Jesus, "Make the people sit down". The disciples were asked to get the people ready for a meal, and then, after prayer, to distribute the food. Jesus doesn't work alone; he works through us and with us. Without him, we cannot achieve any great works. Without us, Jesus will not work; he wants us to willingly share with him.

We should also note his concern. Jesus says, "Gather up the left-overs, so that nothing is lost". Who would have thought that Jesus, who was able to feed 5,000 with 5 loaves, would be bothered about the crumbs and scraps? But, of course, Jesus doesn't want waste; he's concerned about how we use the gifts God's given us, and how we deal with the world. So what might appear to be leftovers are precious to him.

In today's Gospel we are reminded of a time when Jesus gave bread to the hungry. Hopefully, , we will soon be celebrating the Eucharist again in church, when we recall that Jesus himself is the Bread of Life. At the end of the Eucharist, the priest gathers up any crumbs, the "leftovers" which remain, so that nothing is wasted.

As we await the distribution of the bread , we are declaring our hunger for the Bread of Life. The wonder is that, through the sign and material of bread, our lives become filled with Christ's divine life. We are nourished by his body, fortified and energised to use whatever gifts we have received to satisfy the needs of others, to ensure no member of God's family goes hungry- in any sense of the word.

Empowered by this Bread of Life, we are confident to use our own gifts and to assert , as we sang earlier, that

*"No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can **ever** pluck me from his hand;  
Till he returns, or calls me home,  
Here **in the power of Christ** I'll stand.                      Amen*