

The Lord is Kind and Merciful
Column for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 2, 2020

It's evening, the "tired time of the day," in a deserted place. Time to wrap things up and head for home. This is the setting depicted in the Gospel (Matthew 14:13-21) for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Consider for a moment the people present in this gospel scene (14:13). There is the crowd. They have been traveling on foot all day looking for Jesus. They are tired, hungry. Over and above their physical hunger, they are hoping for something to satisfy their spirit. Despite their fatigue, hope holds them together in their desire for healing. Maybe within their hearts and souls there will be some cure because, after all, this is Jesus' reputation. Others have attested to his healing powers. A miracle would be so satisfying

Then there are the disciples. They have been with Jesus all day. As much as they desire to follow him and serve those he has come to save, their energy level is low. The disciples' resources are very limited—a couple of fish and five loaves of bread. Hardly a meal for this crowd. They ask Jesus to do what makes perfect sense, wrap things up and let the people go into the village so they can buy food. At this hour, taking a break, rest, would be so satisfying.

Jesus too is tired. News of the death of John the Baptist weighs on his heart. He needs a bit of solitude to grieve the loss of a beloved cousin. However, when he sees the crowd, Jesus' heart is moved with pity and he begins to cure their sick. A little help would be so satisfying.

This is the scene that Matthew sets—a deserted place filled with limited, imperfect human beings, all with needs they hope to have satisfied. The Savior, putting aside his sadness, ministers to those in need and seizes the moment to reveal the abundance and riches of the kingdom of his Father. His actions show what truly fills and satisfies human need.

Even though the disciples know that the crowd is hungry they are beyond any creative thinking as to what they might do to give Jesus some help. "There is no need for them to go away," says Jesus, do something, "give them some food yourselves" (14:18). In this teaching moment, the weary disciples realize that by themselves, they cannot accomplish much. Perhaps this gospel scene is representative of all the little messes that good Christians find themselves in when, they forget to turn to the Lord for help. "Bring the [bread and fish] to me" and ask everyone to sit down, says Jesus.

The final verses of the gospel reveal the abundance of Jesus' love for his disciples and the crowd. He asks the disciples to give him their limited resources, the bread and fish. He blesses these gifts and his blessing is the multiplying factor. The crowd is fed. The disciples are his instruments of relief. They have plenty of food to pass around. No one leaves hungry. Everyone is energized by the surplus of Jesus' lavish and bountiful love. In this deserted place, there are 12 baskets left over.

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