

Crowd Expectations

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It is interesting that this gospel reflection about Jesus and the crowd comes during a week when multitudes numbering from 55 to 65 thousand people put aside all vestiges of normal life and found their way downtown to Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum. Despite street closures, very limited parking, overcrowded buses, and another crowd with inside tickets, they found standing room in the Forum's outside plazas. And, they were united in their high expectations of cheering the Milwaukee Bucks to a national championship.

Perhaps this year, Milwaukee Christians can appreciate a bit more the crowds that followed Jesus. As a renowned preacher and healer, people began to believe that Jesus was their long-awaited messiah. They put their normal lives on hold to travel to the mountain seeking to experience Jesus' power. They brought high expectations that his miracles would heal their physical infirmities and satisfy their spiritual longings. While Jesus preached to them, personally interacted with them, and satisfied their hunger, they saw him, not as the Christ, but as someone who they could carry off to be their earthly king.

The disciples with Jesus on the mountain did not appear to have expectations of any special event. While not unwelcoming, due to their fear of food sparsity, they appeared to be simply overwhelmed which is surprising since this was not the first time they were in a situation with Jesus where he had concern for others and did something about it.

Jesus, ever the master teacher, saw the multitude coming to him. He knew what he had to do and seized a moment that had overtones of the Lord's Supper to be in their presence and minister to their human needs.

Early Christian readers of John's account of the loaves and fishes miracle would see its connection to their religious history. The scene of Jesus seated on the mountain would have been reminiscent of Moses receiving the law on Mt. Sinai. The symbolism of bread, not unlike manna in the desert, and the timing of the Passover feast, which memorialized the Exodus story, would have been easily understood by early Christians. From a catechetical perspective, the miracle of the loaves and fishes prepared these early readers for the beautiful "bread of life discourse," which follows in John's Gospel.

Every Sunday, we Catholics have the opportunity to come to the mountain and to be nourished by the Eucharist. No matter what our expectations are, no matter our human weaknesses, Jesus, truly present in the Word of God and in the consecrated bread and wine, knows what we need to be healed and ministers to us. Like those crowds in downtown Milwaukee and near the Sea of Galilee, we should find time to celebrate. For us, it's our Savior's triumph over sin and death and the victory of his saving graces which will nourish us in the week ahead.