

# A Message from Godfrey

Our gospel today is the story of the feeding of the five thousand. It's a familiar story that we know quite well. Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd. It is getting late in the day and people were unsure what to do. Jesus decides he wants to feed the people but the disciples say that it will cost too much. Eventually it is discovered that one young boy has tucked away in his knapsack, presumably hidden from these hungry mob, five loaves of bread and two fish. This small amount of food seems like a waste of time if you ask the disciples. It will never be enough. What is five loaves and two fish among five thousand hungry people? But then Jesus has everyone sit down, he takes the loaves of bread and the two fish and he turns it into enough food for everyone to eat their fill and, in fact, for there to be plenty left over. It's a nice, comfortable and familiar story.

I don't know about you but even though this is a familiar story, anytime a miracle story like this comes up as a Sunday reading it always seems to beg many questions. My mind takes over and I start asking all sorts of questions. Did that really happen? What's the truth in this story? I often think that there has to be a logical explanation.

I often try to explain the miracle. For example, when Jesus is at the wedding at Cana and all the wine runs out and Jesus, apparently magically turns water into wine so that the party doesn't need to stop. Sometimes I wonder if he just diluted the wine that was there with water, apparently making more wine, or if there were just extra jars underneath the table that no one knew were there.

Or let us take the five barley loaves and two fish that feed five thousand people. I mean, did the fish and the bread simply grow back any time someone took a bite out of it or did Jesus multiply them at the beginning into hundreds of loaves and fishes, dividing them among the people? Or did it happen through the people being moved by this child giving over everything he had, that they could feel their hidden food weighing down their pockets and their heavy guilt weighing down their hearts. As the baskets were past and the people slipped some of their own bread and fish in to share with everyone else. I like that explanation very much.

Sometimes people ask about this story, "How did he do it? How did Christ feed all those people with so little food, with merely five loaves and two fish?" I like what one commentator suggested:

Some people want Jesus to work a transformation of the loaves so that the loaves continually multiply, endlessly, so that the loaves themselves experience transformation and become an endless supply of bread.

But others suggest that what was really transformed were the selfish hearts of five thousand men that when these five thousand men saw the example of the little boy giving Jesus his five loaves of bread and two fish, these men were inspired to look inside their coats and share the food that they brought with them, food that had been hidden inside their clothing. The real transformation was not of the loaves but of five thousand selfish hearts.

So which would be the greater miracle? The transformation of the loaves or the transformation of selfish hearts?

I would like to suggest to you that some people would prefer to focus on the transformation of the loaves in order to avoid focusing on their own selfish hearts that need to be transformed. Focus on the magic of it all in order to avoid the transforming miracle needed in my life and heart.

If Christ worked that miracle today and transformed five thousand or five million selfish hearts, we would feed the whole world. Christians today could do greater miracles than he did when he was on earth; and if the selfish hearts of Christians were transformed we could feed the entire world. Focus on Christ's transformation of selfish human hearts and you will discover the essence of this miracle.

But also we need to talk about Holy Communion. In this passage, the liturgical references seem clear. Jesus took the bread...looked up to heaven... gave thanks (gave Eucharist)... broke the bread...gave it to his disciples...who gave it to everyone...and they all ate and were satisfied. These actions seem parallel to Holy Communion. In his famous book on the Eucharist, Dom Gregory Dix talks about the four fold action in the Eucharist which we see today.

We bring- at the Offertory the gifts of bread and wine are placed on the altar. We bless- at the most holy moment in the Eucharistic Prayer we have the Words of Institution,

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;

do this in remembrance of me.”

“Drink this, all of you;

this is my blood of the new covenant,

which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it,  
in remembrance of me.”

We break- We break this bread, to share in the body of Christ

We give- we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in its real presence.

And then we read the Gospel of John’s version of this story and we discover that the feeding of the five thousand is a prelude to Jesus’ teaching , “I am the Bread of life” and Holy Communion. In John, chapter six, we also find the most complete description of Holy Communion in the whole Bible. In John, chapter six, Christ says: “I am the Bread of life. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, I live in that person and that person lives in me.”

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will never die but live forever.”

All this from the miracle of sharing their food, hidden in their clothing that meant that their lives were transformed by the intervention of God in the same way in which our lives are transformed every time we receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the eternal meal.

Thoughts and prayers

Godfrey

