Reflection for 25th July

Miraculous events!

Jesus and his disciples were having a really busy time, last week we heard of successful missions and heard glorious personal feedback being shared with Jesus by those whom he had sent out. But we also learnt just how difficult it was for those early disciples and even for Jesus himself to find a little time for peace and relaxation.

Once again in the Gospel story we see huge crowds gathering because they had either witnessed or heard testimony of the glorious things that Jesus was able to do.

They brought their sick and all who were troubled with them merely in the hope that he may show compassion upon them and heal them from their adversities. Crowds gathered much as crowds gather today for any major figure or event which happens to come along. Clearly it has been some time now since huge crowds were able to meet in our present world because of the pandemic and even now we are all being encouraged to be careful and responsible both toward ourselves and others. Yet in gathering together there is something which feeds the heart of humanity, and enables us to let go of our inhibitions and doubts and simply learn how to live.

Such thoughts were clearly in the hearts and minds of all those who had gathered together to be with Jesus, they were desperately searching for something and someone both to feed them as well as to show forth compassion upon them.

So Jesus does just that.

He once again gives an invitation to all those who are gathered around to sit quietly together, he speaks and responds to their needs and then he feeds them both physically and spiritually.

This particular miraculous intervention has always intrigued me, how can Jesus produce so much from so little. The obvious response is simply to affirm that nothing is impossible for God and to leave it at that, yet I do believe there is something far more profound being expressed before us through the re-telling of this particular encounter.

If I were planning to take a sick relative to an event and to hopefully spend some quality time listening to someone with undoubted healing ability I would inevitably have made sure that I went prepared.

I would not go to any such gathering unless I either knew that refreshments were going to be available, or without taking my own. We owe it to ourselves to care for ourselves and especially for those whom we may have responsibility for. But in this case that at least at first glance does not appear to be evident. Jesus had undoubtedly performed many miracles of healing and he had poured out upon those gathered countless pearls of wisdom, but the hour was growing late. There were very limited available resources and so Jesus acts.

He takes what the young boy had sensibly brought for himself, blesses it, breaks it and then he shares it in all its abundance. Nothing is impossible for God, but people are often reluctant to share unless they are encouraged to do so. This is what Jesus is doing in this account, he shares what one has with countless others with the effect that everyone else who like the young boy had come prepared are encouraged to share themselves. It is not so much that God intervenes and provides miraculous food for 5000 people, but rather that God intervenes by touching the hearts of his people, reminding them of the need to be generous in spirit. We have within us all the ability to be generous either with our wealth, or with our love.

However our generosity is not simply dependent on what we receive rather the opposite, generosity is our response to God for the little that we have, because when it is given by God it is always given in abundance.

Faith is not dependent on what we see or receive, but rather on discovering what we have to offer. God always provides his people with all they need, it is only through the inability of humanity to be generous from the heart in thanksgiving that causes the inequality and poverty which we see in the world around us.

One of the greatest things which Jesus shares with all those who are gathered around him is the knowledge that if we place our trust and confidence in his amazing ability to deliver, then we will be richly blessed both in this life and the next. We are called to have faith and believe that nothing is impossible for Jesus to achieve because of his undeniable trust and confidence in his Father. This is why in the Gospel the miraculous feeding is immediately followed by Jesus walking on the water. We hear the struggle of those in the boat attempting to row through the storm, they see Jesus and are terrified but then he speaks and delivers them immediately to safety. Jesus delivers, all we have to do is believe and respond with trust and confidence and we shall all be fed both physically and spiritually, for all things are possible for us if only we believe as Jesus did.

To give total trust to something which is beyond our understanding is always a difficult task, it is only natural to be uncertain, hesitant or even to distrust that which we cannot fully know, and yet Jesus shows us the way. Paul reminds us so beautifully and eloquently of this very reality in those chosen words from the Epistle to the Ephesians.

“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Let yourselves be filled with the love of Christ Jesus and you will truly discover the breadth and length and height and depth of what it is to be made in the image of God. Discover yourselves and be generous in thanksgiving and the fruits of the Kingdom will be presented before you and you will be fed abundantly.

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