



Sunday 2nd August 2026

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14.13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.'

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Other Readings: Genesis 32.22-31

Psalms 17.1-7, 16

Romans 9.1-5

Matthew 14.13-21

Homily

500-750 words

Jesus has just heard of the murder of John the Baptist. In response to an event which foreshadows his own execution at the hands of the powerful, he retreats by boat to a remote place. But such is the popularity of his ministry that the crowds seeking healing pursue him even there. Rather than turning the boat round and fleeing in pursuit of peace and quiet to pray, he has compassion on them and resumes his ministry of healing.

As the day draws on his disciples advise him to send the crowds away to find food. We can imagine their bewilderment when his response to what they think a perfectly reasonable suggestion is: **"They need not go away; you give them something to eat."** He then ignores their practical-minded protest that they have barely enough to feed themselves and takes what little they have to feed the crowd.

That this miracle is the only one reported in all four gospels points to its significance in the tradition of early Christianity. So how are we to understand it?

First, we must pay attention to the way it relates to scripture as a whole; the past experience of Israel, the present experience of the Church, and their future hope. A deserted place recalls God feeding the people of Israel with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11). The multiplication of a tiny amount of food echoes the prophet Elisha feeding a hundred men with one man's few barley loaves (2 Kings 4.42-44).

Key too, are Jesus' actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving; anticipating the Last Supper and the Eucharist. As the Church reflected on the Eucharist in the light of God's abundant provision – reflected in the baskets of fragments left over after all **“were filled,”** - it recognised in both miracle and sacrament, the anticipation of the banquet of the kingdom (Isaiah 25.6), and **“the marriage supper of the Lamb”** in Revelation (19. 9). Matthew's words, **“were filled,”** echoes the 4th Beatitude: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”** The miraculous feeding shows that God wishes to welcome all humankind at the banquet of the kingdom, in which both the physical and spiritual will be satisfied.

Having explored the rich scriptural background, we can go further by placing ourselves in the scene and story. We can imagine ourselves in those who come to Jesus in need of healing and then of food. For most of us physical hunger is quickly satisfied. That is not the case for many in our world, and even in our own society. Some of us will experience physical or mental health problems, bereavement or loneliness. Some will be searching for meaning and purpose in our lives. Mother Theresa once said that physical hunger was not the problem for most westerners, spiritual hunger is.

It may seem bold to imagine ourselves as Jesus, but we are called to the imitation of Christ. If we see people in need do we respond with a compassion which is more than sympathy but actual help?

More humbly, we can put ourselves in the place of the disciples. Their concern for the well-being of the crowds is genuine but limited to telling them to go elsewhere for help. When Jesus says, **“You give them something to eat,”** they protest that their resources are hopelessly inadequate for the task. Do we think ourselves inadequate to meet the needs of others? Yet in the miracle we see Jesus using the disciples' few loaves and fish, and then to distribute what he makes of them. Christians are called to share in his active compassion. As St. Teresa of Avila say:

“Christ has no body but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on the world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands, with which he blesses the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Among those sceptical of miracles, it has been suggested that what happened was something meant to stimulate others in the crowd to share what they had. Perhaps that misses the heart of the matter, which is about the nature of God; but can we ignore the call the miracle makes on us and the spiritual food it offers? Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. Where do we see physical or spiritual hunger in our community, our country, our world, and how do we respond to it?
2. Does our prayer life deepen our sensitivity to the needs of others?
3. Do we think that our abilities and resources are too weak to be of any use, or do we trust God to use them in ways we might not imagine?
3. Where do we find the spiritual resources to answer the needs of those who come to us? Do we hunger to be fed at the table of word and sacrament?
4. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
5. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(Or)

*Gracious Father,
revive your Church in our day,
and make her holy, strong and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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