



EIGHTH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

July 30

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 14:14-22

[Feeding the Five Thousand]

At that time, Jesus saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

THE SERMON

Jesus sits in a boat on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the region where He had grown up. From the boat, which symbolizes the Church, the Lord teaches the multitude through parables. We read many such parables in the four Holy Gospel Books (according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The people in His town synagogue then reject Him, and His cousin, Saint John the Baptist, is arrested.



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After the Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist at the hands of Herod the King, Jesus departs from the region around Nazareth by boat to a deserted place by Himself. The Lord often spends time alone in prayer because He restores humanity by His prayers, as the Divine Son who takes on human nature. The recent events also sadden Him. But instead of allowing that to become a root of bitterness against people, it becomes the means by which He shows His love and mercy to all.

When the people hear that He has gone to a deserted place, they follow Him on foot from the cities. When Jesus goes out, He sees a great multitude, and He is moved with compassion for them and heals those who are sick. As we read in the Scriptures, the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abiding in love. His kindness is shown to all people, bringing them to Himself and fulfilling their needs.

The Lord begins by healing the sick, and He does this all day, for many people are coming to Him. He sends no one away. At the end of the day, when the sun begins to set, His disciples come to Him and ask Him to let the people go to the villages to buy some food, since they had not eaten all day.

The disciples had compassion for the people, realizing that all those families, with women and children, had not eaten all day, and if they did not go back to their villages quickly, they would not be able to buy any food. However, the disciples' compassion stopped short of realizing that their practical solution did not consider that the Son of God Himself was *with* them, and His compassion is as limitless as His power and grace.

Jesus said to the disciples to give them something to eat. The Lord's statement here shows us two things. Firstly, they did not need to go anywhere other than the Lord's presence, which is true for all of us. When there are difficulties in life, what is most important is that we do not turn away from Christ and focus only on other possible solutions. But instead, turn to Christ *first*.

Of course, the Lord teaches us to be wise, yet simple, so that we may use the good resources of this world to help us find solutions, as these resources are a gift from God. However, we transcend human effort with our focus on the Lord, Who is the primary source of peace, love, grace, and Divine Power to help us in our needs. We do not need to go anywhere else. We are with Him when we pray, opening ourselves to His grace since He loves us unconditionally.

Secondly, we see that the Lord challenges the disciples to do what seems impossible, to give food to the multitude. We know that this story refers to Jesus' miracle of the multiplication of the bread to feed the people. Still, the Lord Himself emphasizes not His own miracle, but the disciples' faith and willingness to serve others. Christ gives us a great example of compassion and love. Before the disciples could fully understand what He was about to do, He challenged their faith to love the multitude as He loves them.

Despite the disciples' objections to sending the people away, the Lord calls for them. The disciples are perplexed because they do not know what the Lord is about to

do. They have only five loaves and two fish, and there are about five thousand men, plus women and children. However, what appears as an impossibility becomes an opportunity for God to show His love and mercy. Nothing is impossible with God's love. Saint John Chrysostom says, "In this miracle, Jesus was teaching them humility, temperance, and charity to be of like mind toward one another and to share all things in common."

In the New Testament, we read of two events of the feeding of the multitudes. They are not the same event. They take place in different places and with other people. Here, there are five loaves and five thousand people, and the numbers represent the revelation of God to His people in the five books of Moses in the Old Testament.

What Moses came to *prepare*, Jesus comes to *fulfill*. As the Lord feeds the people of Israel with manna in the desert of Sinai in the Old Testament, now Christ, the Son of God Himself, is also in a deserted place, inaugurating the New Testament, and feeding five thousand people with five loaves. The Lord also says to His disciples later that they would be fishers of men. The two fish are also symbols of the people of God gathering to Christ, from both the Judean and Gentile people.

The Lord directs the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looks up to Heaven. He blesses and breaks the bread and gives the loaves to the crowds. This language is key because, in the New Testament and the liturgical tradition of the Church, the bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given to us. This points to the Holy Eucharist, which Jesus foreshadows in feeding the five thousand.

The Lord knows about our worldly needs for food, clothing, and shelter, but He also provides us with the Bread of Immortality, which feeds our souls unto eternal life. It is in the Holy Eucharist that, above all else, we encounter Christ, are mystically united to Him and are renewed.

All the people eat and are satisfied. They take up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. The number twelve symbolizes discipleship (the twelve Apostles) and feeding people with twelve baskets is how the Holy Gospel shows us that the Lord feeds *all* of his disciples, both physically and spiritually.

We are called to have compassion for those who are hungry and those in need. We are also called to come to Him, who is the Bread of Life, and receive His Body and Blood at the chalice unto eternal life. When we allow ourselves to be strengthened by the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, we can go out and similarly strengthen others by the grace of God.