

Dear Parishioners,

During the summer months while in the seminary, we were often assigned to different parishes in the Diocese. Quite often, one of my responsibilities would be to assist the Eucharistic Ministers by going to the nursing homes within the parish boundaries and bringing the residents Holy Communion. Several of these facilities had wings for the patients with Alzheimer's. Many no longer knew their families or those around them, could not feed or dress themselves, and in some cases, could barely speak or see. On a personal level, I would barely get a reaction from them. However, as soon as I began to say the "*Our Father*," there was an immediate and profound change. I could see the recognition in their eyes as they began to recite the prayer they probably knew from childhood. That was one point with reality that these patients somehow managed to maintain and it was a truly wonderful experience to share the Body and Blood of our Lord with them. I truly believe that they knew and understood the gift they were about to receive.

Perhaps the hungry crowd in today's Gospel didn't quite understand the gift they were being given as the disciples distributed the blessed bread and fish. What the disciples were able to give them through the power and compassion of Jesus, however, was much more than food to satisfy their physical hunger. They were given a share in the abundance and fullness of life only Jesus can offer. Jesus opens the disciples' and the crowd's hopes to a fullness they do not expect ... the *future* banquet of eternal life.

To the disciples' concern about the isolated place, the late hour, and the crowd's hunger, Jesus replies, "*give them some food yourselves.*" Hampered by the scarcity of food they have at hand, the disciples are unable to feed the hungry crowd. Jesus takes and blesses the loaves and the fish ... the disciples themselves do feed the crowd ... and "*all ate and were satisfied.*" This miracle is essentially a sign of God's kingdom. In that kingdom there is never scarcity or lack of power to respond to others. There is always the superabundance of God's nourishing and satisfying presence among and within us. There were twelve (12) baskets left over ... and the number twelve (12) has special significance in Jewish tradition ... it is an image of the abundance God gives us and the fullness of life that we are offered.

The Gospel tells us that those in the crowd "*were satisfied.*" Jesus' compassion not only filled their immediate need, but also gave them a glimpse of what truly satisfies ... eternal life. In the crowd's seeking Jesus, they "*were satisfied.*" In our continually seeking Jesus, we too will be satisfied ... one day ... with eternal life. This weekend's Gospel prepares us and orients us to a most satisfying future!

Jesus' response to the crowd's needs was an in-breaking of God's kingdom, embodied by the very person and presence of Jesus whom the crowd sought. If we are the presence of the risen Christ today, then we too are an in-breaking of God's kingdom when we reach out in compassion to satisfy the needs of others.

One challenge of our everyday living of the Paschal Mystery is to see the self-sacrificing dying we embrace for the sake of others as an in-breaking of God's presence and kingdom. In other words, our compassion and care for others is more than simply satisfying another's need (as important even as that is in itself). Like Jesus, our compassion carries with it the foretaste of eternal life. This places our everyday self-sacrificing in a whole different context. We should be better able to see how our dying to self leads to rising and eternal life.

At the same time, sometimes, we must hold out our hands to accept the gift of Jesus. We must be willing to receive the life that divine presence brings ... whether that comes from the Mass and prayer or through the goodness and kindness of others. And always, we are given life in abundance.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always! May you and your families be well and safe! Have a great week!

~ Fr. Larry