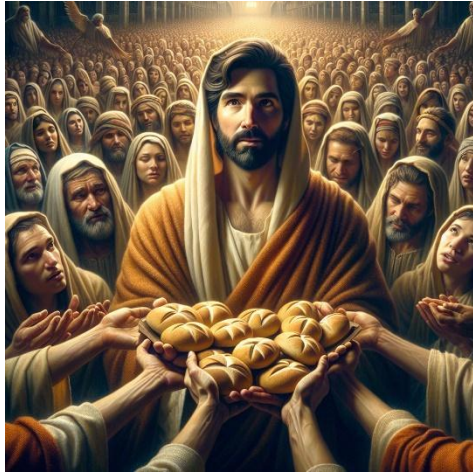


Homily – June 22nd, 2025 – Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

As with every gospel story we hear, including this one, the miraculous feeding of the multitude, it's often helpful to read the story that precedes it. It gives us



context and context is always a good thing to have. Bad theology--and there's lots of it around--doesn't do that. People, including priests, will take a handful of lines from the entire Bible and run all of reality through those three or four lines in order to justify why they are right and why everyone else has to get with the program.

Fundamentalist preachers tend to do that, but I'm sure you've met other people who have done the same.

The story that just precedes the feeding of the multitude is where Jesus sends out his disciples on their first mission. He instructs them to bring no staff, no bag, no bread, and not even a second shirt. Upon their return Jesus asks them if they lacked anything, to which they answer, "No." Without staff, bag, bread, and a second shirt, not only did they lack nothing, but they also claimed that their mission was successful, if you can call ministry "successful."

But as life would have it, for them and for us, the moment you're enjoying a little bit of happiness, a little bit of success, the next thing you know, you're thrown into a crisis. Life is like the weather in the Maritimes—sunny now but wait 10 minutes and it can be a very different story. Sometimes we even pessimistically think to

ourselves, “This is too good to be true. I never have two good days in a row.”
We’re almost waiting for the other shoe to drop, for our luck to turn into bad luck.

The disciples’ success has now turned into a crisis with 5, 000 hungry men (not to mention the women and children) in front of them. Nothing in the past lessons they learned from Jesus seems to have prepared them for such an overwhelming challenge. Or, have they overlooked something?

Back to the story. This story of the feeding of the multitude is mentioned six times in the four gospels and in a couple versions, like the one we have today, Jesus instructs people to sit down in groups of 50 like flower beds. A strange request. It’s an allusion, a hint you might say, referring to the Prophet Isaiah who said that when the Messiah comes, even the desert will bloom. The signs the ancients looked for, to tell them the Messianic age (the age of the Messiah) had arrived, was that the Messiah would bring justice, peace, and abundance.

The disciples do not see abundance in front of them. They see need, lots of need. They see 5, 000 hungry men before them. Their fault, as is our fault, is not that these disciples came unprepared to feed such a large crowd, for how could anyone have anticipated such a crisis? Their fault was forgetfulness. They forgot whose presence they are in...Jesus’ presence. They forgot the lesson Jesus was trying to teach them when he sent them out on a mission with no staff, no bread, no money. After all, Jesus did ask them if they lacked anything while on mission, and they answered unanimously, “No!” If Jesus provided for them then, why wouldn’t Jesus provide for them now as they faced this hungry crowd? It’s a

question I struggle with in my own life. I look back on all the ways God accompanied me through the troubled times of my own life. Yet, it's always the present struggle that makes me think, "God, where are you now?" It's as if I suddenly contract amnesia.

Remember this story is set in a "deserted place." It's the desert. There is only harshness, no water, no grass, no amenities whatsoever in the desert. Yet, Jesus has them sit down on the grass in rows of 50 like flower beds in that deserted place. When the Messiah comes even the desert will bloom. So, now you know, when you open to this Jesus, and you invite hunger, the desert turns to flowers. The disciples don't invite hunger; they try to push it down the road as someone else's problem.

I have to admit, I, too, like the disciples of old, get overwhelmed with the needs I see all around me. The lack of affordable housing, the fact that many of our Indigenous people on reserves have been without clean water for years, the lack of social services to deal with mental illnesses, endless wars, refugee camps, and the list goes on. In those moments I'm like the disciples—overwhelmed and wishing I could send it all down the road to another village, so that I don't have to deal with it.

I'm also like the disciples in another way. I suffer from forgetfulness. Jesus does provide for me and even gives me a few "successes," but the very next day, when a problem arises, I forget that the God of abundance is still in my corner and has never left. With God all things are possible, even the overwhelming things.

The feeding of the multitude, like I said, is the most repeated story in the entire Bible. Maybe the gospel writers wanted us to remember something we tend to forget so easily. There is a pattern, we ought not forget. It is the pattern of receiving, giving thanks, and giving. Receiving, giving thanks, and giving...that's it. Even Jesus had to receive the meagre five loaves and two fish, otherwise he would have nothing to give either. He receives what God gives him and not necessarily what he thought he needed. He trusts that if God gives it to him, it will be enough. Then he gives thanks for it. And lastly, he gives it away as freely as he received it in the first place.

When you and I know who is in our presence, and really know it, looking for more staffs, more money, more bread, and more fish, will fade into the background. Overcoming scarcity always begins with looking at what God has already given us, trusting it's enough, giving it away, and watching it multiply. In the end, it won't be a question of "how did Jesus do that back then?" but "why do we doubt our ability to do it now?"

"You give them something to eat."

~Fr. Phil