

Jesus’ disciples were out there in a desolate place, and they were struggling. They were wrestling with a question. What responsibility did they have to feed this huge crowd? The little bit of food on hand—five loaves of bread and two fish—was probably intended to be the meal for Jesus and His small band of disciples. No matter how creatively they brainstormed, there was no *natural* way for them to make the food stretch to feed that many people, so the disciples thought the best thing to do was to send the people away so that they could find their meals in the surrounding villages.

The people had come from the cities, following Jesus on foot to this deserted place. Jesus felt compassion for the crowd and proceeded to heal the sick among them (v. 14). While the focus of the account seems to shift from healing to feeding, the fact is that the activities are similar in the sense that they are meeting the needs of those gathered around Christ. This should sound familiar to us today, since that is the essential call of the Church: To meet the *physical* as well as the *spiritual* needs of those sent to us by the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, Jesus could have somehow just conjured up the food for the multitude without going through all the work of distributing the loaves and fishes. To feed well over five thousand people had to have taken some time and effort on everyone’s part. It would have been much easier to just make the food drop down from heaven, right into each person’s lap. But we see that there is much more to the story than just filling stomachs. The Gospel tells us that Jesus took the bread, “looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowd” (v. 19). Notice that it is the disciples who are doing the distribution. In that act they are participants in the miracle being recorded, adding that very personal, human dimension to the event. It demonstrates that each of us can be used by God to perform the miracle of sharing the gifts that come from Him.

While the disciples saw only the difficulty in the situation, Jesus was able to see the opportunity to demonstrate God’s glory. I really want you to let that idea sink in. So much so, I’m just going to repeat it. **While the disciples saw only the difficulty in the situation, Jesus was able to see the opportunity to demonstrate God’s glory.** I just got back from our church body’s national convention, and I can tell you, this principle was front and center in many of our discussions. That’s true at the national, synodical level, and that’s true at the local, congregational level. In our humanity, we tend to focus on difficulties and problems, but always, always, always, Jesus sees and finds the opportunities to demonstrate God’s glory through the problem. And that’s the real lesson of this text. No so much, oh gee, isn’t it neat that Jesus did miracles back then. But rather, wherever Jesus is, He is working in the midst of difficulties to generate and distribute gifts that are needed for life...and He involves His people in making sure those gifts are given.

When you stop to think about it, that describes Jesus’ work in full, doesn’t it? In the midst of the greatest struggle he ever faced, Jesus, at the cross, paid for our stingy self-centeredness, and made it possible for the gifts of forgiveness and new life to be given away.

Those who receive become those who give. Jesus gave the disciples the opportunity to be ministers of God's miracle, and that is what His Church continues to do.

Life is full of difficult situations where it might seem easier to simply send strangers away to find their own sustenance. But the words of Christ need to be our *call to action* as well. You don't need a degree in theology to be able to explain the love of God. You don't have to be ordained clergy to have compassion on a stranger and provide for them in their time of need. What you do need to have is faith in Jesus and a willingness to be used by Him to show the glory of His Kingdom. This does not require any special commission or anointing, since you already received both by virtue of your baptism. You are fully equipped to do God's work at this moment.

In his sermon on this Gospel passage, John Chrysostom, an ancient pastor, pointed out that it was through His disciples that Jesus performed the miraculous feeding, and the miracle continued even after the multitude were fed, for when the people were finished eating, the disciples were able to collect 12 baskets of leftovers, noting that there was a basket for each disciple, including Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Jesus (Homily 94 on Matthew). When you give—when you share the gifts of Jesus—there is always enough to go around. The miracles of God never come up short when you step out on faith. Through their obedience to the Master's command, "You give them something to eat," twelve followers of Christ were used to miraculously bless thousands.

You should never get caught in the devil's trap of believing that you are unable or unworthy of spreading God's blessings in the world. Even the little bit you have—be it money, time, talent or knowledge—is more than enough to meet the needs of others when you use them for God's Kingdom. All you need is to have the willingness to look on our neighbor with compassion and offer what you have in the name of Christ.

The words of Jesus are our guiding principle: "*You* give them something to eat." Whether it is the bread of wheat or the Bread of Life, we are responsible for feeding the people God sends to us. By stepping out in faith and love we, too, will see the miraculous bounty that God has planned for the world.