

Mark 6: 30-44

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' ³⁷But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?' ³⁸And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' When they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' ³⁹Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²And all ate and were filled; ⁴³and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Commentary: Jesus' compassion for people is truly divine in its depth. He begins by withdrawing to a deserted place for the benefit of his followers who need some quiet and rest from the masses that mob them night and day. But the masses follow them and won't leave them alone. How does Jesus respond to this endless need? He feels deep compassion for them for 'they were like sheep without a shepherd.' And so, he addresses their needs spiritual and physical. He feeds their spirits through his teaching and he feeds their bodies through an awesome miracle.

The feeding of the masses in a deserted place recalls the feeding of the people by God in the wilderness, liberated from the bondage of oppressive slavery in Egypt. This miracle is also not just magic. Imagine when people are inspired to compassion and share what they have. When we share what we have we feed ourselves spiritually by growing in our compassion, and those who receive are fed spiritually in receiving the love and finding agency by expressing gratitude and sharing in turn. Body and soul are transformed when love gets activated.

In this season of Covid-19 we are all forced to share the burden of social restrictions. However, the burden is not equally borne. From women at home carrying the extra workload of managing a household and work, to those on the front lines carrying the extra fear and stress we all bear, to those without work, without a home or in a home that is not safe for them, to those in a long-term care facility or nursing home terrorized by the virus, vulnerable and receiving limited care from overstretched staff... How can we share and care for others in this season and grow in our own meaning and purpose as Jesus' disciples?

Prayer: You know our situation, O God... Overwhelmed, underwhelmed, distracted, disoriented, frustrated, afraid, bored, lonely, uncertain... Seeking to find assurance, inner peace, hope, direction... seeking inspiration to love and a way to love more generously... seeking to share the burden and hoping others may care and share with us... Find us wherever we are, O God... feed us deep within with the fullness and peace that comes from knowing we are yours now and forever... Amen.