The Loaves and the Fishes

**It will be enough.** *Lord, just five little loaves and two fish! What are you thinking?? It will be enough. Bring what you have to me.* We all know the rest of the story, we just heard it.

Being hungry and caught short is nothing extraordinary. We’ve all been there. Unexpected guests added to the table: we’ve likely been there too. Facing hangers other than for food, and being caught short – who hasn’t experienced that! I hope and pray you have also discovered how a common situation can turn into a God moment. We take the little we have, bring it to Jesus, the human face of God’s infinite compassion, God’s desire that we all be nourished, and amazing things can happen. Calling upon his presence, we do as he did, we take the little we have, bless, break and share, and the miracle happens again.

This is one of the most frequently retold episodes in the ministry of Jesus. Depicted often in art, it is also in each Gospel, often more than once. Why? Not because folks love to hear about things that happened long ago and far away. It has been told over and over through every generation since the 1st century, because it names an experience every generation has tasted and cherished, a basic experience of living the Christian faith. People hear the story. They see the dynamics at play, the rhythm of our life with Christ, the possibilities. They realize: I’ve experienced that! Something small, ordinary … one hunger or another; there is not enough to meet the need, by any human measure. The Lord sees the dilemma, is moved with deep compassion, puts divine mystery into motion, and suddenly, abundance!

A caregiver is exhausted, just a smidgen of energy left. Their loved one develops a new need. They offer their exhaustion to the Lord. The Lord blesses the offering. Prayers are answered: the energy to respond seems to come out of no where.

Parents: how often is far more patience than you have needed? Or more answers than you have? Or you need to show confidence things will be alright, even when you aren’t convinced? Offer the Lord empty hands, and the Lord multiplies the patience, the confidence, beyond any reasonable expectation. Key ingredients: a genuine need, our few loaves and fish, whatever it is they represent, the Lord’s deep compassion, and bringing our little as an offering to him, to bless, break and share.

It happens in daily life, and it also happens right here, week after week. Another reason the account is so deeply loved, so often retold – it captures the essence of Eucharist.

Before the opening prayer at Mass, we have three little invocations and responses calling upon God’s mercy: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Look around. Think about what you see. How much mercy do you think it would really take for each person in this assembly to be ready to celebrate these holy mysteries with clean hand and a pure heart; to celebrate worthily? Could there be enough? Yet we offer these three little invocations, the presider offers a simple prayer, and God showers down a virtual flood of mercy, to wash over us.
Not only is there enough mercy to make us right with God. There is more than enough. We can collect some and take it home to share with others.

A lector walks over to deliver the message of a great prophet like Isaiah. The reading speaks of a great feast, a feast of God’s love for us God providing for us, setting a table with all we need – the basics, and much more, to fill our spiritual hunger. Before walking over to the ambo, don’t you think our lectors sometimes feel like the disciples in this Gospel? What are you thinking Lord? Sure I can read out loud. But what is that, when you want the feast to actually materialize, want folks to be fed & nourished right now, as I speak. How can I use my little gift to actually meet so many spiritual hungers? The Lord simply responds “you feed them”. And he works the miracle again. Once more, more than enough spiritual food, enough for now, and baskets of leftovers to chew on through the week, even some to share with others.

I could go on, with the prayers of the faithful, but instead, let me get right to the heart of the matter. The center of our Eucharist, where Jesus does exactly what he did in that deserted place in our Gospel. He invites us to bring a few dishes of small hosts and a bit of wine to the altar. He blesses it with a prayer very much like the one he likely offered that day in the Gospel: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who bring forth bread from the earth…. Then he breaks the bread, a powerful, astounding gesture – breaking bread together with us! He gives it to the ministers, disciples, who give it to those gathered. Part of the mystery within the mystery: no one but God even has a clue how many, and how varied are the spiritual hungers that are met, when Jesus gives us, not just bread, but himself! (Often folks may not even be aware how many of their hungers are touched each week, until Eucharist is not available to them.) So we receive the Lord. He feeds our soul. We take time to give thanks for the precious gift. In those specially blessed moments after communion, we may share the deepest love, gratitude, concerns or even fears with him.

But it doesn’t end there. In the prayer after communion, we always ask that the mysteries we have participated in, the sacrament we have receive will bear fruit. We ask that the Eucharist will have an impact in our daily life. After the prayer, we are sent out, to live the mystery. We glorify the Lord by our lives when we take who we are, what we have been given, as little as it may seem on a bad day; we take it, give thanks to God, we break it and share it throughout the week in union with Jesus. We are not just to receive Eucharist. We are called to live the Eucharist. To become Eucharist, the Body of Christ in the world today.

This morning as the bread and wine are brought to the altar, think and pray about what you can put on the altar as your gift. What of you, if taken, blessed, broken open, and shared could help to feed some hunger that you may encounter this week.
As you come forward for communion, picture being with Jesus and the multitude. As the body of Christ is given to you, hear Jesus saying: “Here. I give myself to you. Now, go and bring me to others through your words, your actions, your forgiveness, your love; all the ways you live your faith. Be my presence to others. Be bread for the world.”