



Matthew 14:13-21

13 When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. **14** So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

15 When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' **16** Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' **17** But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' **18** 'Bring them here to me,' he said. **19** He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. **20** They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining, twelve baskets full. **21** Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

Other readings: Isaiah 55:1-3 Psalm 144 (145) Romans 8:35,37-39

The multiplication of the loaves is perhaps the most renowned of all the extraordinary acts of Jesus which we call miracles, since it is found in all four gospels, and in Matthew and Mark we find two separate accounts. The popularity of the tradition is surely due to the similarity between what Jesus does here and what he will do on the night before he dies: he takes the bread, he blesses it, he breaks it and he shares it.

The story can be understood in various ways. Matthew may have in mind that to provide bread for the crowds in 'a lonely place' is precisely what God did for the people who wandered with Moses through the desert. For Matthew, Jesus is a new Moses whose teaching and mighty acts surpass those of Moses himself. The story also speaks of Jesus as feeding the hungry, satisfying both material and spiritual need, and providing an example in not sending the people away, as the disciples had suggested.

Most powerfully, however, the story prepares us for the gift of himself which Jesus will give in death, which will be prefigured in the sharing of the last Passover meal. The Eucharist is for us the constant making present of the gift of Jesus to nourish us throughout our lives. 'Do this in memory of me,' said Jesus.

Do I endeavour to understand the deeper meaning of the miracles of Jesus?

How does the miracle of the loaves encourage me to value the gift of food?

We pray that the sharing of the Eucharist will teach us to share with those in need.

We pray for those who lack the basic requirements of life, and for a renewed commitment among world leaders to provide food for all.