



July 25th

THE NEW SHOFAR

Philip: we do not have the resources for this feeding!

Jesus: that's true, but you do have me!

What is most important is the faith-vision – not the funding

As I ponder today's gospel, I cannot help but wonder if Philip had something to do with the finances of the band of apostles. As Jesus was telling them to get about the task of feeding this enormous crowd of hungry people, his immediate answer was to see the enormity of the challenge, the near to impossible invitation to feed so many people. For him the facts were settled: *Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.* And of course he was correct.

But it was not just Philip who was mis-reading the new reality that was a world forever transformed by the coming of the Messiah. Andrew too could not see beyond the normal way of looking at things. He could see only the apparent impossibility of the task, the problems, the limitations and the inevitability of failure. The facts were simple: we do not have what is needed and while it is a great thing to feed all of these people, it cannot be done. Let's send them home and maybe feed the next crowd.

But what was it they were missing here?

They had already been with Jesus for some time and had personally witnessed the power and authority associated with His mission in the world. In the minds of the disciples a disaster was in the making but in the mind of Jesus there was already something new unfolding. He was planning a miracle but they could not see it coming. This would be His fourth now recorded in John's Gospel: (1) the miracle of the water turned wine, (2) the miracle of healing of the official's son, (3) the miracle of the healing of the invalid and the pool of Bethesda, and (4) the present miracle in view—that of the miraculous multiplying of the fish and loaves.

Miracles are what happen when Jesus is involved in human situations. In the Old Testament we call these things *theophanies* – literally God-noises. If God is present in a moment of human history, then things happen. We see stories of claps of thunder, the mountains shaking, lightening flashes and associated signs and wonders. These are all meant to be invitations to faith. If we can acknowledge the presence of God in the midst of what is happening, and respond in faith and hope, then God's power will astound us.

This is what St John is trying to record here and throughout his gospel. This Jesus the Son of God, the Messiah has made His home among us. He comes to us with all of the fullness of God. If the apostles believed that, feeding the crowd would have been easy.

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It is not unlike the situation of the Exodus!

For men and women wanting to believe, it is often easier to begin the journey in a spirit of great confidence and hope but tougher maintaining that spirit when the joy of faith has had its knocks over time. The Hebrew people crossed the Red Sea singing songs of glory and thanksgiving to God for the miraculous gift of freedom and a whole new life in Canaan...*Let us sing to the Lord he has covered himself in glory!* But then, a few days later, the people said to Moses *Did you take us out to the desert to die? There was food aplenty in Egypt!* These are the same people who had witnessed firsthand what God does with and through men and women to put their trust in Him. If He could destroy the Egyptian army and push back the waters of the sea, surely feeding them in the desert would be a pushover.

This is what the Apostles had forgotten. If God could provide manna in the desert to those following Moses, surely He could and He would miraculously provide food to the crowd now following Jesus. It all comes down to faith: do we believe? Can we believe? Or, is our faith in what God is wanting to do in us, for us and through us conditioned and tempered by the practical, the financial by the very limitations of our humanity?

Jesus feeds the five thousand men (plus women and children)

Different Gospels tell of the feeding in differing ways, but John has a specific message in mind in the way he recounts this feeding narrative. For him, it is important to note how it is Jesus Himself who takes the bread, and after giving thanks, He distributes it to the hungry people. He does not hand it on to the apostles to give out. For John, it is Christ who must sit at the centre of all that is being done in the name of God. If we wish to “feed the hungry” then we do not become social workers and run a food bank. Feeding humanity begins with Christ. We might then open such a bank, but that is always step two, or three, or four. Without God the Hebrews would still be in Egypt and the crowd in the gospel still trying to find their way home hungry.

We are being called to pursue God’s vision for our parish communities

Right now God is calling our faith communities and individual Christians to a new vision for life, a new place in the world and a renewed manner in which we carry out this divine will for us. We can call it *feeding the five thousand* for this world in which we live today is hungry for the Bread of Life. Nothing else can offer them lasting and fulfilling satisfaction – which is why the Father sent His only Son: to feed us.

Today’s Gospel invites us to see God calling out to us to advance His Kingdom in the world. But to see it through the eyes of Jesus the Christ rather than through the eyes of Philip and Andrew. Yes, the costs, risks and demands will be great, at times almost impossible to overcome but that is only if our starting point is not Christ. It was only when the Hebrew started walking forward that God could feed them and guide them. It is only when we take up our Spirit-driven vision for the future and begin making it a reality in Christ, that the bread and the fish will be multiplied and prove to be enough.

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