

Father Chapin's Homily



AUGUST 6, 2023 FEEDING OF THE 5000

Our Gospel comes from Mathew 14:13-21

So today we have the Gospel that everybody knows, the *Feeding of the 5,000*.

Theologians will say this is a prefiguration of the Eucharist, *Feeding of the 5,000*, also known as the *Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish*.

Like I said, everybody knows this Gospel, and part of the reason why it's so well known is that it is found in all four of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which makes it unique.

In fact, the only other miracle I can think of that is found in all four gospels would be the resurrection, which gives you a sense of how important the *Feeding of the 5,000* really is.

I mean, think about it, what would the Good News be without the Resurrection?

I'll tell you what, nothing.

The fact that it's in all four Gospels really does lend itself to the gravity of what's going on here.

It's a seminal moment in the ministry of Jesus.

It is a turning point.

News of this miracle of the *Feeding of the 5,000* would soon spread far and wide, catapulting Jesus from a local phenomenon to a national figure.

In fact, in the Gospel of John, we find out that they wanted to try to make him king after this miracle, which I'm sure sounded like a good idea to the disciples because, of course, remember, they're looking for a warrior king and this would definitely fit into their plan.

So once again, the *Feeding of the 5,000*, it's a big deal.

What does it mean, and most importantly, how can we apply this into our daily living?

Well, that's what we're gonna be talking about today.

At first blush, this story appears pretty straightforward.

Jesus is providing dinner for those who are following Him.

But there's a whole lot going on here.

Today, we are considering the Matthean account, and as I said, or I don't know, did I say?

We're in the 14th chapter of Matthew, and like I said, I know I say this just about every week, and I don't wanna sound like a broken record, but one should never consider scripture in isolation.

One must always find the context in which the scripture appears.

So, let's set the table with a little context.

We're in the 14th chapter, so what has just happened?

Well, we've been in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew for the last three weeks.

Jesus has been trying to explain, well, the unexplainable, the Kingdom of God.

“The Kingdom of God is like...”

Beginning with the parable of *the Sower*.

I love that story.

The reckless farmer who is casting his precious seed all over the place, but such is the reckless love of our Father for you.

Now some of that seed falls on a path, some of that seed falls on rocky soil, some of that seed falls on thorny ground, and some of that seed falls on rich soil, begging the question, when our Lord throws the seed at you, upon what soil will it find?

Next comes the *Wheat and the Weeds*, which describes how our world is a field where the righteous and the evil grow side by side.

That certainly seems to be the case.

And then, of course, last week we had the treasure buried in the field and *the Pearl of Great Price*.

And I love all those parables, they highlight a different aspect of the Kingdom.

But of course, the finite mind can never fully understand an infinite concept.

All we can really do is point at it with allegory and metaphor.

“The Kingdom of God is like...”

This is what Jesus does, and He is been at it for some time.

But today, in our Gospel, He has just heard some devastating news.

And you know how it is when you hear some really bad news, sometimes you just really don't want to talk about it.

You know, sometimes you just wanna get away and be alone.

When Jesus hears of the death of John the Baptist, He withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by Himself, 'cause He wants to get away, He wants to process this.

But can He?

No.

He can't because **the crowds heard of this and followed Him on foot from their towns.**

Why?

Because the word is out, and Jesus is a hunted man.

Can you imagine just hearing this incredibly devastating news and you're just trying to get away?

Just think about this for a while.

This must have been very, very difficult for Jesus.

The man that Isaiah 53 describes as the **Suffering Servant**.

Not only has He lost his cousin, He's lost him in a most brutal and violent way, as he was beheaded by King Herod.

When He disembarked, He saw the vast crowd, and His heart was filled with pity for them and He cured their sick.

So even though He's just trying to get away, even though He just needs a moment alone, the crowds push in, and that's impossible.

And His compassion moves to pity, and He heals them.

Why?

Because that is what He does.

Mark describes the same scene as Jesus looking over the crowds and **seeing them as a sheep without a shepherd.**

Luke describes the same scene having Jesus preaching from sunrise to sunset, all about the kingdom of God.

The Gospel of John has Jesus looking at the crowd, turning to Philip, and asking, **"Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?"**

All four accounts are slightly different, but they're all true. Kinda like eyewitnesses to a crime.

They will all see it from a different and unique angle.

But then again, that's kind of how scripture works, doesn't it?

It will reveal to you what you need to hear as it speaks to you in whatever season it might find you.

The *Feeding of the 5,000* is a huge moment in the ministry of Jesus, evidenced by the fact that it appears in all four Gospels.

Today, I wanna try to blend all four of these accounts into one story so we can try to figure out what it's trying to teach us.

My friends, we must never forget that we read scripture, we study, we ponder scripture not to try to find some secret knowledge, but rather to hold a mirror up to ourselves and be confronted, to be convicted, and hopefully, ultimately, to be transformed.

That's what the Holy Spirit's up to.

It's calling you to change and transform yourself into the image of Christ.

Now, Jesus had heard of the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, and He is just trying to get away.

Just needs a break.

But the crowds make that impossible as they come to Jesus with their earthly needs, and with great compassion and pity, He heals 'em, and then preaches to them about their eternal needs.

And it begins early in the morning and it continues.

Nine o'clock, 11 o'clock, two o'clock, four o'clock.

My friends, this was a very long service.

And you gotta feel for the poor disciples because, remember, they came here for rest, so they started out tired.

So here they are, they've been on their feet all day, they're hungry, they're tired, they did not get a lunch break, and now it's about seven in the evening and the sun is going down and the shadows start to fall.

And I imagine they came to Jesus and said, "Hey Jesus, this has been a beautiful service, said a lot of

nice things, but, you know, maybe it's time to kinda start wrapping this thing up.

We need to send these people away 'cause they're hungry and we're hungry."

And Jesus responds, "**There is no need to send them away. Why don't you feed them?**"

"Oh really? All we have is five loaves and two fish.

How are we going to do that?"

And Jesus says, "**Bring them to me.**"
In other words, what you got?

Bring it to me.

My friend, this is the deeper meaning of this miracle.

This is what the *Feeding of the 5,000* is all about.

What you got?

Bring it to me.

Consider this.

Jesus is the second person of the blessed Trinity.

He's divine.

That means He's all powerful, all knowing, all present.

In other words, He's God, and as God, He can do whatever He wants, however He wants to do it, which includes the power to create something out of nothing.

We see this in Genesis, as God speaks things into existence.

So, we know He can do this.

We saw Jesus give sight to the man born blind.

Where there were no eyes, now the man can see.

So, we know He can do this.

We know He has the power over nature as we see Him calm the storm at sea.

So, we know that Jesus could have fed this crowd any way He chose to do so.

He could have snapped His fingers, and filet mignons would've fallen from the sky with a side salad.

Could have happened, but He does not do this.

This is really important.

This is what the Gospel is all about.

Rather than creating something out of nothing, which we know He can do, He chooses to take what we can offer and He multiplies it.

And in the case of our disciples today, all they can offer is five loaves and two fish.

Gospel of John has a very interesting detail.

The boy with the five barley loaves and the two fish.

Barley loaves.

Barley is a significant detail because a barley loaf is a coarse bread.

A barley loaf is a second-tier to fine flour bread.

You could call it low-rent bread.

Barley loaves were only eaten by the very poor.

"There is no need to send them to go away. Give them food for yourselves."

Five loaves and two fish.

That's all we got and that's hardly enough to feed such a crowd.

But Jesus takes what little they have and then multiplies it in their hands to make the miracle happen.

Just as He will take what little you have to offer to make His Kingdom come to pass.

So, in the end, you're the miracle.

Begging the question, what gift are you willing to offer our Lord today to make His kingdom come to pass?

That's a good question, but I have another question.

Why would He choose to do it this way?

Well, to answer that question, we have to go to the story of creation.

And God said, in the story of creation, **"Let there be light," and there was light.**

So, God speaks this world into existence.

Where there was nothing, there is now something.

Meaning that His words have creative power.

Now, by the time He gets to creating us, He does something different.

He says, **"Let us make man in our own image,"** which begs two questions.

Who's He talking to and what does it mean to be made in God's image?

Well, let's start with that first question.

Who is He talking to?

Because if God's by himself, who is He talking to?

Well, actually, He's not by himself.

May I suggest that He's speaking to the Son and the Holy Spirit because the eternal triune God is always Trinity and has always been there.

When the Spirit moved across the deep, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were already there.

Now, as far as that second question, what does it mean to be made in the image of God?

Does that mean that when I look in the mirror, this is what God looks like?

No, of course not.

God is Spirit.

So, what does it mean to be made in the image of God?

Well, it means that I share the essence of God, and what is the essence of God?

Well, number one is to create.

So, if I'm made in the essence of God, then I'm made as a mini-creator.

Just as God's words have creative power, so do mine, and that is true.

Now, further down the line in this creation story, we run into an interesting detail, often overlooked.

God asked Adam to name the animals.

Now that's a bit odd.

Why would He do that?

Only the one who creates has the right to name something.

Was God having trouble coming up with the names Himself?

Was He having some kind of creative block that day?

No, of course not.

He chooses to have Adam name the animals because He wants Adam to become a co-creator in His kingdom work, just as He wants you, as one of His children, to become a co-creator in His kingdom.

To become a partner making His will come to pass in this world. And this is the true meaning of the *Feeding of the 5,000*.

Because, as I said, you are the miracle.

You are the gift.

Only question left is, what are you willing to offer God to make His kingdom come to pass today?

So, the *Feeding of the 5,000*.

What can we learn?

What lesson can we take from this?

How can we apply this into our daily living?

Well, the deeper meaning lies in the gift of the five loaves and two fish.

As Jesus looked out across this vast crowd and felt pity for them, He presented to His disciples a seemingly impossible situation.

Did they believe?

Not really, no, I don't think they did.

But they were willing to suspend their disbelief and do exactly what Jesus told them to do.

Which very much reminds me of the *Wedding at Cana*.

When Mary looks at the servants, and what does she say?

"Do whatever He tells you to do."

And in doing so, they became co-creators in His kingdom work as the water became wine.

My friends, this is our call.

God is calling us to participate in His kingdom work.

What are you willing to offer Him today to get that done?