

My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel presents to us the well-known miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The miracle is one of our Lord's great examples of transforming nature beyond human understanding. Today, however, I would like to explore a foundational element of the miracle, which is compassion.

The Gospel begins with Christ healing a large crowd, and it very clearly says, "...*He had compassion on them...*" (*Matthew 14:14*). Christ, who was paradoxically both King and Servant of all, did not come to heal the crowd because He wished to be glorified as a great man; but rather, He came to demonstrate both the mercy and love that God shows to each and every one of us, and the compassion that we are called to reciprocate towards our brothers and sisters.

His compassion is further demonstrated later in the Gospel, as the day comes to a close. The Disciples have grown tired of the crowd, and worry about the practical responsibility of feeding thousands of people who are away from their homes. The Disciples have just spent a long day watching their Master relieve people's illness and burdens, which could certainly not have been an easy task. Yet while these are understandable concerns from a human perspective, the Disciples lack the Godly compassion and insight to which they themselves have just been witnesses. When they ask Christ to dismiss the crowds, He responds once again with love and concern, "*They need not go away...*" (*Matthew 14:16*).

The text of the miracle has been analyzed many times: how He blessed the five loaves and two fish, and how, when the pieces were distributed, five thousand men—plus women and children—were satisfied. Surely, Christ's ability to provide for the needs of many with so little demonstrated His true Divinity to the disciples, but one is also sure that the Disciples learned to be more patient, more charitable, and merciful towards their neighbors.

In a way it is a comforting thought, that these first proud and open followers of Christ could have such weaknesses similar to those in our present, constantly moving society: hunger, exhaustion, and irritability. I pray then, that we do not allow these weaknesses to help us sin further, but that we instead think of Christ. Christ, who as man surely felt tiredness and hunger, but as God, saw the state of His creation, and willingly emptied Himself of His needs, to demonstrate the kind of behavior our Heavenly Father expects from all of us. For while men may turn away from their neighbors, Christ Himself will always be present, gently saying, "*They need not go away...*"

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