

Sermon for Seventh Sunday after Trinity
St. Joseph Parish
Mark 8: 1-10

August 3, 2025
Father Herb

Mark records first the Feeding of the Five Thousand and then relates this morning the gospel miracle story of the Feeding of the Four Thousand. The former relates to a predominantly Jewish throng, for only the menfolk are counted in that gathering. The need to feed maybe 12 or 15 thousand confronted Him there. Jesus now being in the region of the Decapolis tells Mark that the Four Thousand famished followers are made up primarily of Gentiles, where no distinction between men and women was made.

While Jesus' ground of compassion with a much larger throng of followers is the fact that the Jews are like sheep without a shepherd, needing to be fed the food of faith, in this morning's gospel, it is the fact that this group of followers face a more basic need. They have been three days with Him and without food.

Unlike the setting for the miracle of feeding 12 to 15,000 people, there is no question in this miracle story of sending the people to the surrounding farms and villages to buy something for themselves to eat. There are no farms or villages for miles around. They are in the unpopulated wilderness. And, attracted and satisfied by Jesus' magnetism alone, they have not even begged for food. Instead, the gentiles have been fed with food for their faith. They forgot all about hunger, it seems. Hunger dissolved when they witnessed the power of Jesus. More than that, they have witnessed what he is made of.

Because just several days ago, a compassionate crowd brought to Him a man who was deaf and unintelligible when he tried to speak. These people besought Jesus to heal him, and so our Lord touched his heart and his tongue. He makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.

And in nearby Bethsaida, Jesus had compassion on his disciples when, attempting to cross a stormy lake, they became terrified when they saw Him walking towards them on the surface of the sea. In response to their need, he said, "Take heart, It is I; Have no fear." ..Power over the forces of nature, Power to quell fear in His creatures.

In these these two miracles Jesus fed Gentiles with food for faith; now He will provide food for hunger..So he has given them bread for the soul and bread for the

body. Lying behind the use of His divine power to sustain the lives of these crowds, is an even greater power that we do share with Him. Jesus attracted these crowds because of the magnetism of His person as well as the drawing power of His love-inspired miracles. And the source of that ability to pull people into His presence was His COMPASSION.

Compassion is not a simple feeling, but a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person, and active regard for his or her good, a view of him or her as a fellow human being, and emotional responses of a certain degree of intensity and duration.

Acts of beneficence that flow from compassion need to be rational and effective, as good as the Samaritan's actions were. To be noted, however, is that compassion still steals in where no action to help is possible or would be effective. God alone can act and we can suffer with the afflicted. That kind of company we share with them is food for them and us. Dying Himself, He shared His suffering with two crucified criminals on Golgotha and Luke says he gave them in those three hours the hope of Paradise.

Archaeologists have uncovered evidence 1.5 million years old that Homo Ergaster was caring for the ill, while 450,000 years ago Homo heidelbergensis females appear to have nursed disabled children not their own. So it seems, humans God has created have a natural tendency to compassion ever since mammals advanced over reptiles: the key for mammals being the development of the autonomic nervous system which gives us excitement and fear and the mechanism of fighting or fleeing. God has built compassion into us.

And the noun "Compassion" does not emerge until the mid-12th century. It seems to have emerged from accumulated medieval meditation on Christ's Passion and the gift of suffering with Him and for Him. "Com"-with; Passion-"Suffering".

In this feeding miracle, Jesus alone gives the crowd food, whereas the disciples had been entrusted when there were far more mouths to feed among the 5000 men, not counting women and children. The primary significance of this miracle, then, is not only to depict the extraordinary power over creation He bears, but also to unveil His power of compassion for all to seek.

Acts of compassion cannot but help to attract others- just to see God's goodness unfold for a person in need is to have one's heart uplifted...So, WHAT DO YOU

NEED?...WHAT ARE YOU HUNGRY FOR? “Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you”. Clearly you have been a follower of Jesus, but are you famished for the kind of food only Jesus can give-food for your faith or even just for your table?

We want to be fed the bread of love and with it the grace to love God and neighbor more perfectly. We want to be fed with the food of Hope, and we are moved with compassion to share that bread with those who have no hope. We want the bread of courage to face a life that seems every day a bit more difficult, and we are moved to share it: we want to lock the arm of one who is lacking courage and retreating from a saving challenge God has sent her.

We want to be consoled in loss, comforted in pain, enfolded when tearful or sorrowful, unburdened from the weight on our souls of accumulated guilt, illumined by His light in confusion or doubt. We are after all still his children.

And we can only trust Jesus to provide such food to go on living in faith. For that, we must be able to recognize our Giver in the Host and chalice, be able to hear his Word and digest it, to stay close to His abiding presence so that we never stray afar, and He can hear us cry for Him.