

Collect: LET YOUR continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church, and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, govern and protect it always through your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God. for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-5

Psalm 145:8-9, 15-22

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:13-21

Sermon: Today's Gospel begins with Jesus having withdrawn to the peace of the Galilee Sea to be alone and escape the clutches and wants of the people who are constantly following him wanting to be healed. Perhaps Jesus needs a time of healing at this moment. He has just gotten the word that John the Baptist has been killed while in prison.

John the Baptist was his cousin, an itinerant rabbi and prophet. He had been imprisoned by Herod. Herod had put John in prison because John had condemned him for taking his brother, Philip's wife, Herodias, and marrying her while Philip was still alive.

Herod had been afraid to kill John because the people believed he was a prophet. Yet Herodias wanted him dead. At a party to celebrate his birthday, Herod was so delighted by the salacious dance of Salome, the daughter of Herodias, that he swore an oath to give her anything she wanted. Her mother told her to ask for the head of John on a platter and it was done.

Now Jesus was in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, alone, thinking about John and grieving. He needed the quiet that the sea offered so that he could heal his hurt and sadness.

After awhile he returned to land and was immediately besieged by a great crowd of people wanting to be healed. He was moved by his compassion for the people and he began to heal them until late in the evening. The disciple noticing the lateness of the evening and the remoteness of the place they were at, told Jesus he had best stop and let the people go into the village and buy themselves something to eat.

Jesus said don't send them away, let us feed them. The disciples told Jesus they couldn't feed all those people; they didn't have enough food. The disciples had looked at their limitation, they only had five loaves of bread and two fish, certainly in their minds, not enough to feed such a large crowd.

Jesus however, looked at possibilities and the grace of God. He told the disciples to bring him the loaves and the fish. He lifted them up to heaven and said the blessing, broke the loaves and fish into pieces and began to feed the people.

The scripture says that the people, all five thousand of them, including women and children were seated on the ground and ate to their heart's content. They were filled and yet there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

In looking at this, God didn't supersize the bread and fish. It was more likely that the people, Jesus, shared with each the food they had brought along with them. In those days, the people did as we sometimes do, they took along something to eat. Often, the people in the crowds were poor and they didn't money to buy food at the shop or restaurants. Not only that, the places they encountered Jesus and that were large enough to accommodate them were remote outside of towns and villages.

The lesson here is that God provides. The disciples had looked at limitations that would not allow them to feed such a crowd. They only had five loaves and bread and two fish. Jesus however looked to God and said the blessing knowing that he would overcome the limitation. Jesus knew that God could turn less into a lot, few into many and little into abundance.

Jesus was mindful of the line in Psalm 23 that said: You spread a table before me (in the presence of those who trouble me); You anoint my head with oil (you bless me) and my cup is running over. Here we see God actively at

work. He spreads a table, he blesses us, and he overfills our cup, giving us even more than we desire.

As we look at what is going on in the United States of America today, we can see the story of the feeding of the five thousand and God preparing a table for us on display. We see people of all colors, all faith, all genders, all sexual orientations, all cultures and all ages united and sharing their disdain for a system that is not fair and in need of change.

They are protesting that there are problems with the existing governance and there needs to be change to make it fairer and more equal. Each group may have a specific goal they want achieved but they are protesting together uniting their actions and voices. And their example is being taken up by people all over the world

Doesn't this remind you of the crowd seated on the ground, waiting for Jesus to feed them with the fish and loaves. They discover that they too have something to offer and so they share what they have. The limitation was exceeded by mutual generosity.

I am reminded of the 23rd Psalm and its words: **In the presence of those who trouble me.** Our nation is ravaged by COVID 19. Its influences is felt everywhere. No church services, restricted schooling, restricted jobs, overburdened hospitals, overworked first responders and loss of faith in those who lead our government. We are promised that God will be with us (he anoints my head with oil, he blesses me). I have hope that one day, soon, this pandemic will end and we will establish a new normal with few of the old restrictions.

In the midst of this pandemic I see people being kinder to each other, they are giving to food banks, they are volunteering, they are not losing hope. One day this will end and we will emerge as a kinder, gentler nation with a greater respect and fairness for people.

Perhaps God's message to us is: FEED MY PEOPLE. Get involved, share what you have, it may only be prayer. Pray that the emptiness that is in the souls of those in charge may one day be filled with a love and respect for all mankind. Pray that the good in people overcomes the bad. Pray that we love and develop a respect for all God's people. Amen.

