

Compassion and Discipleship

One of the dominant themes in the Gospel of Matthew is the theme of mercy or compassion. Without compassion, we cannot be true and authentic disciples. Mercy and compassion can be rare qualities in societies and culture not influenced by the Gospel. Sometimes mercy, compassion and forgiveness are not regarded as virtues, but seen instead as signs of weakness or failure to enforce justice.

But in today's Gospel, Jesus shows us that compassion is at the heart of what makes us Christians. His heart was moved with compassion for the crowd that came to him, and he not only cured the sick among them but also provided them food by the multiplication of loaves and fish. The mercy of God can be said to be God's willingness to draw near to human beings in a loving and saving encounter as seen in today's gospel. Jesus drew near the people seeking him, his heart was moved by their brokenness, he healed their wounds and nourished them with food.

Notice that the disciples did not see this as their responsibility. They ask Jesus to send the people away to look after themselves. And even when Jesus pressed the disciples to "give them some food yourselves," they saw another obstacle; we don't have enough, "five loaves and two fish are all we have here." Where they saw limitation, Jesus saw grace, which comes from his compassionate heart. He saw that there is no need for the people to go away because if they are willing to offer what they have, with the compassionate presence of the Christ and his transforming power through which the universe was made, their little can become plenty. He asks them to come to him with the little they have. He took what they have, blessed it, and gave it back to them with the task of sharing the loaves to the crowd. All ate and were satisfied and there were leftovers. This is a clear testament that if you have Jesus, you have everything. That is why Prophet Isaiah, in today's first reading, invites us to come to God even when we feel inadequate or lacking. He says: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water. You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat. Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk." For nothing can separate us from the love of God.

We are the disciples of Jesus today, and like the apostles, who prefer that the people go away to look after themselves, we sometimes stay clear of the challenge of Christian loving. As a biblical scholar puts it: "this often happens because, again like the disciples in the story, we feel we have little or nothing to offer." But Jesus can take the little we have to offer, bless it, and give it back to us so that we might bring fullness to those whose lives we touch.

The Gospel also calls to mind the Eucharist. Jesus takes the bread, raises his eyes, blesses, breaks and gives it to the disciples to distribute. We hear the same words every day at Mass. As he transforms the eucharistic bread, so he also transforms us into eucharistic people. The baskets of leftover fragments picked up by the disciples indicates that the healing, gift and nourishment Jesus offers can never be totally consumed and is still available to anyone searching for it. Do you believe this? Today despite your human limitations, recommit yourself to helping share Jesus with the world.

May the joy of the Lord be your strength.

Mass Schedule: Please see the front page of the bulletin for our Mass schedule. All Thursday Masses going forward will be at noon, which was the original Mass time pre-pandemic. All Masses will be in the church to allow room for physical distancing.

New Parish Office Days (*beginning in September*): To better serve our parish community and provide more days for people who want to meet the priest, our new parish office days will be Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm. Due to the pandemic, the office service will be by appointment only. Please help our staff to better serve you.

We Are Proud Of Our Knights: We are very proud and grateful to our parish Knights of Columbus and some of their family members who did a two-day community service by weeding, cleaning and sprucing up the grounds and surroundings of our local Post Office. Their generosity and service caught people's attention and drew positive comments. It is an example of being the light of the world. "Shine your light before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16).

Solemnity of the Assumption: This year the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary falls on a Saturday and is therefore not a holyday of obligation. However, it is still a holyday. The Universal Norms of the Church's Calendar state: "For the pastoral good of the faithful, it is permitted to observe on Sundays in Ordinary Time those celebrations that fall during the week and that are agreeable to the devotion of the faithful, provided the celebrations rank above that Sunday in the Table of Liturgical Days. The Mass of such celebrations may be used at all the celebrations of Mass at which the people are present." Since Solemnities take precedence over Sundays in Ordinary Time all Masses on the weekend 15/16 August will be celebrated as the Solemnity of the Assumption which also fulfills the Sunday obligation.

*--Fr. Anthony Ahamefule
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