

## **The Sufficiency of Jesus Christ**

### **Matthew 14: 13 – 21**

I was impressed by the example and the words of Francis when he became the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. He demonstrated how Christians should live, simply, and as servants to the world. His visit to a prison to wash the feet of inmates was a clear indication of his humility and desire to serve the needy. But I was equally impressed when he asked the thousands standing in St. Peter's square on Easter Sunday and through television, millions of others, to receive Jesus into their hearts.

As we obey our Lord's command and go beyond the walls of our church building to make disciples, we do so by serving others wherever there is a need, and we do it in the name of Jesus, always with the invitation to receive Him into their hearts. Surely this is the purpose and mission of the Church. Service without Christ is not Christian service; Christ without service is a clear rejection of Christ's example, and his call to serve others. We do this with knowledge that Jesus is sufficient. To explain the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, I want to draw your attention to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000.

Jesus had withdrawn to a remote area near the Sea of Galilee, crossing to it by boat. He wanted to be alone with his disciples. But people saw where he was heading, and many walked around the lake so that they were waiting for him when he and his disciples landed. We are told that 'he had compassion on them and healed their sick'. In this way Matthew sets the stage for the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand that follows. The feeding of this great crowd is the only miracle found in each of the four Gospels, so it must have made a

tremendous impact on those who were present. We want to learn what Matthew is teaching through this incident.

**The first lesson is stated clearly: Jesus cares about people, especially those who are poor or suffering.** Chapter 14, verse 14 says, “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” There is probably more to than this, however. We should remember that Matthew makes some of his best points by the way he links incidents together, and if he is doing that here, we can hardly overlook the contrast between the party King Herod threw on his birthday for his friends and the party Jesus throws in the wilderness for the crowd, since one story follows the other. The first party is given by a King in his palace, the second by a Galilean preacher in the desert. The first was for the important people in this world, the second for the masses. The first was centered on Herod; it was his birthday. The second was centered on the crowd. The first was a drunken orgy, the second a pleasant country meal. The first was immoral; the high point being Salome’s provocative dance. The second followed holy, edifying teaching by the Lord. The first ended with the murder of John the Baptist, the second by the feeding of those who had no food. The first was for this world only, the second anticipated the heavenly marriage supper to which people from every tribe and nation are invited and to which the poor of many nations will come. What explains the contrast? The answer is this, Herod cared for no one but himself; his actions were determined by his lust for power and a desire to save face before his friends; while Jesus cared for other people. Jesus took time to heal, teach, and feed them, even though his desire was to be alone with his disciples and teach them. Jesus’ compassion for the masses is a common theme in Matthew. The first clear lesson of this story,

therefore, is that Jesus cares for you and me, and he also cares for those outside the walls of the church. Joseph Scriven's poem of 1855 asks a good question and provides the correct answer: 'Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Saviour, still our refuge – Take it to the Lord in pray! Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In his arms he'll take and shield thee; Thou will find a solace there.' When we bring our lives, with all our needs to Jesus, we bring them to one who not only cares about us and is compassionate but who understands us and is able to help us in our need. Peter wrote, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you". (1 Peter 5:7) We who are Christ's body, the Church, need to remember that we can do nothing greater or more important, than to meet people in their need and to lead them to the one who cares for them.

**The second point of the story is this: in spiritual matters we can do nothing apart from Jesus Christ.** Jesus said in John 15, verse 5: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." In one way or another each of the Gospels indicates that Jesus pressed this point on the disciples. In John, Jesus initiates the lesson by asking Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5) The next words explain. "He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do." The story continues by showing how Philip assesses the situation from a human perspective, replying, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite". It is after this that Andrew brings forward the boy with the five small barley loaves and two small fish, which Jesus then uses for the miracle of the feeding. What seems to have stuck out most clearly in the minds of Matthew

Mark and Luke is that Jesus told the disciples to do something to improve the situation. He said, "You give them something to eat". The emphasis does not come across as forcefully in the English translation as it does in Greek. In Greek there is the added pronoun 'You'. The emphasis seems to have been, "You, you do it; why do you come to me?" Since Jesus knew the nature of the problem and was already aware of what he was going to do, the only reason he said what he did say, was to impress on the disciples that they could do nothing by themselves. Yet we do have what God has first given to us, gifts of all sorts, and although we can do nothing of spiritual value with them by ourselves, we will find that they are useful and sufficient if we place them in Jesus' hands. That is what happened here, of course. The disciples could do nothing, but they had five small loaves and two fish, and when they gave them to Jesus, they found that they were all that was necessary.

**All we have said about our having nothing to offer leads directly to the next lesson, for the story is meant to direct us to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.** This is what John 15 verse 5 says. The last part stresses our inability to do anything, but it does this so we will draw on Jesus' resources: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit". Only after that does it say, "apart from me you can do nothing". We can bear fruit, indeed 'much fruit' (v. 5), and even 'fruit that will last' (v. 16). But this will be true only if Jesus is working through us since he alone is able to meet anyone's spiritual need. In this story Jesus meets the needs of the crowds abundantly. He took the five loaves of bread and two fish, directed the people to sit down, and then, looking to heaven and thanking God, broke the food and distributed it to the people. The story concludes by saying, "They all ate and were

satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children". (vv 20 – 21) When placed in his hands, Jesus is able to multiply our gifts in meeting the needs of others.

**The fourth lesson of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is that God works through people.** That is, although Jesus alone is sufficient for all human need, he nevertheless chooses to work through us as channels by which he meets that need. In this case, he worked through the disciples, who were given the broken loaves and fish, distributed them to the people, and gathered up the pieces left over. He could have called down manna from heaven, thereby imitating Moses. Again, Jesus might have caused a small piece of bread and fish to appear in each man or woman's pocket. There were probably other things he could have done. But Jesus did not proceed in any of these ways. Instead, he worked through other people; through the disciples, according to Matthew's account; especially through Philip, Andrew, and the boy with the five small loaves and two fish, according to John's gospel. Jesus chose to use others in feeding the 5000. Here is a story that may help us. On one occasion Jesus described a man who was visited at midnight by a friend but who had no food to serve him. So he went to a neighbour, who was already in bed, and called out to him, "Friend lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him. ( Luke 11:5-6) The host must not have had any food, or he would not have bothered his neighbour in the middle of the night. He had nothing; he knew it, and he knew his neighbour would help. So he went to him to get what he needed. We are in exactly that position. You and I have

nothing, but we have a friend in heaven who is able to supply what our friends around the world need. When we go out into the world to serve them, as we must do, we first go to God with empty hands and cry out, claiming that double friendship: “Friend, divine Friend, a friend has come.” The wonderful thing we discover is that God supplies our friend’s need as he has supplied our own. May we personally and collectively find Jesus is sufficient for all our needs; and as we find ways of ministering to the world around us, may we not only meet people in their physical and emotional needs, but in their deepest need. Urge them as Pope Francis did, to receive Jesus into their hearts and lives.

LET US PRAY:

O God, our heavenly Father, we come barehanded to you, but desiring to follow and serve Jesus. Through the indwelling of your Holy Spirit so guide us as we seek to minister to others that their immediate, and deepest needs will be met in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.