

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

If we've ever hosted a family get-together or an open house or a parish dinner, we know that one of the concerns besides all of the cleaning and decorating, cooking and baking, is to make sure that there's enough food for everyone. And, we hope, enough food so that those who want seconds can enjoy. We don't want anyone to go away hungry, even the unexpected guest. We may over-prepare and have so many leftovers we don't know what to do with them.

The disciples in today's gospel faced something similar. They had some food, five loaves and two fish, which was enough for Jesus and them. Realizing that their poor larder would not make even a crumb let alone a mouthful for the five thousand men not counting women and children who followed Jesus all that day for Him to heal their sick they asked Jesus to send the people from that deserted place to the villages so they could get themselves something to eat. It was a logical plan.

But Jesus turns their logic upside down when He tells them "They need not go away, you give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16) The disciples must have been confused. Did they hear Jesus right? Use the little food that they had, barely enough for themselves, to feed thousands of people? Impossible. Perhaps for us humans impossible but not for God. They told Jesus exactly what they had: five loaves and two fish. He asked them to bring the food to Him. Though they could not see how this could make any difference to so many hungry mouths they brought to Jesus their offering in all its poverty before such a throng of humanity. The Jesus "looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." (Matthew 14:19) And what seemed to be nothing turned into a miraculous something. Everyone ate and not only ate but ate to their hearts' content. No stomach went empty. And twelve baskets of leftovers were collected.

This great miracle proves that with God all things are possible. Jesus asks us to follow Him, to imitate His life. But He doesn't tell us, "You're on your own. Do it all by yourself, no help allowed." Quite the opposite. He knows our situation. He knows the temptations we face. He knows our sins. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He asks us to but turn to Him, to make an effort, a footstep towards Him. A turning of our mind and heart, of our inner person toward Him like He asked the disciples to bring to Him their poor offering. Jesus sees our striving to reach out to Him, to leave our sins behind, and He comes to meet us. He knows we can't be saved by ourselves, that it is He who saves us but it does require something of us: to bring ourselves to Him. And when we sin, get back up and turn again to Him if that be once a day or a thousand times a day. It is Jesus Who will meet us as the loving father ran to meet his prodigal son who was returning to him.

And we have something of this miracle we heard in the gospel today and how we are to turn to Christ Jesus in the Liturgy we are celebrating right now. We gather together as one body with Christ as our head in this temple. Instead of bread and fishes we bring to the Father bread and wine, food almost as old as humanity. And we offer these up in memory of Jesus' offering on the night before He died when we hear words that are parallel to those in the gospel today: "He took bread...and when He had given thanks and blessed it and hallowed it and broken it, He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles." But this was not the bread that fed the multitude, this bread and wine He now gave to them to eat and drink was His own Pure Body and Precious Blood given for the remission of sins. Another miracle happens at every Liturgy as we, like the disciples, make our simple offering to the Father Who sends down upon them His Holy Spirit Who changes them into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for us to eat and drink for the remission of our sins and unto life everlasting. We can follow Christ more closely by receiving Him often in Holy Communion and living that Communion with Him with those around us. Then we who are poor sinners are united to Christ, sanctified by partaking of the gifts He returns to us: the bread and wine now His Body and Blood. Let us offer to Him ourselves that He may work in us, walk with us so that we, too, may be transformed into His likeness both here and in the kingdom which is to come.