

BULLETIN 21

18th Sunday of the Year – 8th after Trinity

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A couple of thoughts on this week's Gospel reading in today's context.

Social distancing

We are all very aware of the need to avoid crowds. Maybe you avoided crowds anyway, but most people have been alone far more often than before during the experience of lockdown and global pandemic. Maybe hearing the story of a crowd of five thousand (actually, that was just the number of men - let's push past that rather sexist crowd measurement technique and assume that the real size was around twenty thousand people: all genders and ages, equally important) makes you shiver, especially as they were passing food around.

My heightened awareness of hygiene and virus spreading since March has caused me to read this story in a new light. I can imagine a photograph of the scene in an angry news headline or Facebook post. Of course, the situation was different then.

They were very different here in February this year, yet alone in Jesus' time. But it made me wonder – what would be different if that act of Jesus' ministry had to comply with social distancing in an outbreak of Coronavirus? Would Jesus have ignored the need to keep social distancing and held the gathering anyway? How are you feeling about gatherings and churches services?

The scale of the event is astonishing: remember, around 15,000 women and children were there (and men as well). The people, the masses, had a hunger to connect with Jesus and be restored, as well as a physical hunger. And Jesus fulfilled both needs. If he couldn't minister to them all in one gathering, how would he have managed? I think that the only way would have been to enlist helpers, to create a team, to spread the load. That would require a large group of people to act in his power and authority and do what Jesus would have done: restoring brokenness and feeding the hungry. Maybe they could start a chain; one act of grace empowering the recipient to go and be a channel of grace to someone else.

Food waste

This passage in Matthew is unusual in that it gives us quite a lot of numerical facts. These numbers tell us a couple of things. Firstly, the food was multiplied in an astonishing way. One loaf became a thousand loaves. It wasn't a measly, rationed affair – it was wild and abundant. Everyone had ample. Everyone ate and was satisfied that day.

Secondly, there was very little waste. It seems that the amount of food provided was spot-on. Plenty, but not excessive. This tells us something about the divine; given that

hunger and poverty was rife in that society, to generate surplus food would have been an insult to those who went without that day.

So today picture yourself as the small child. How will you respond? Do you keep everything for yourself? Do you pretend you haven't heard? Do you dismiss that what you have is so insignificant that it can't be of any use at all? Or do you say Here I am – May I follow your way. Reflect on your current situation, our church, the building that you worshipped in, the needs of those around you. Bring to mind all that you are feeling and thinking about those situations. Now ask God how you can help? What is your part to play? Are you holding back or freely offering?

With every Blessing

Fr. John

WORSHIP THIS WEEK IN CHURCH AND ON LIVE STREAM

Sun 2 – 18 of the Year	10.00 Mass (Ord) 18.00 Mass	People of the Parish John Hogan (RIP)
Tue 4 – St. John Vianney	10.30 Rosary	
Wed 5 – St. Mary Major	10.00 Mass	J.D.W.Roberts
Thu 6 – Transfiguration OLJC	10.00 Mass 10.30 Adoration	Jo Gallagher (RIP)
Fri 7 – of the Sacred Heart	10.00 Mass	Norah Green (RIP)
Sun 9 – 19 of the year	10.00 Mass 18.00 Mass	People of the Parish Gerald & Mary Birchall

GOSPEL REFLECTION

This week traditionally is when our Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes takes place. As I tuned live, into Lourdes TV, to watch the English mass on Wednesday evening, I was surprised to see how many people were gathered, socially distanced, at the grotto. This reminded me of Sunday's Gospel where the crowds of expectant people gathered together waiting to be fed by Jesus through his Word. When they all joined in the meal of bread and fish blessed by Jesus in answer to his prayers to God's; almost an enactment of Holy Communion that was to come later at the last supper.

I am reminded of how I would go out in the evenings usually to see the torchlight procession and then to simply wonder the green fields alongside the river Gave in the darkness punctuated by the wonderful yellow gold glow of candlelight and the gatherings of groups of people praying the Rosary heightened by the sound of running water. It is virtually impossible to explain what an engaging sight this is, not just for your eyes but for your sensory soul, all these people gathered worshipping the Lord.

What we realise from the Gospel is how inadequate we are at feeding ourselves and how reliant we are on the generosity of God. Sadly, many in our world do not enjoy the abundance of food we have, and we must pray for relief from their poverty.

For the pilgrims in our gospel story; Jesus' ministry was a new experience and for people at that time with no other form of communication other than word of mouth having a prophet coming among them must have been simply mind blowing. But isn't that exactly what the reality of attending Mass is or should be for we pilgrims today.

We certainly cannot put laziness, inconvenience, discomfort or other social interests forward as an excuse for our inability to attend Mass. Those of us who are apprehensive or unwell do need to shield from COVID-19 and for that reason the Bishops of England and Wales granted a dispensation which is still in place today. Jesus is waiting for all who could - to return - to feed us just as he did for the five thousand.

Our rich oasis of life has suddenly become a desert and we have to use our spiritual consciousness in order to create a fresh new garden in our lives. We cannot look back and live in the past if St Paul and disciples had done that there would be no Church today. *'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.'* We cannot be like the disciples holding their hands up in dismay at only having five loaves and two fish. We have to go out and metaphorically make the effort to stand up and be counted; to witness to our faith. I know this is not easy! In the gospel today it is an enormous step, as people today move from having too little to receiving an abundant gift from God.

Communal love and prayer produces not only satisfaction but abundance. We may feel lethargic tired and deprived of our old lives at this time, but God gives us sufficient food for ourselves with his blessing and from that alone we will have sufficient resources.

I pray to God that all of us are here to experience this week next year and those who want to make the pilgrimage are able to join me in Lourdes.

I return to some of the final words of Saint Bernadette in Lourdes. When confined to her death bed she was handed a crucifix and she said "I cried for joy when I took the crucifix in my hands. I'm happier now with this crucifix beside me than the Queen could be upon her throne." And she prayed "Oh, Jesus, how I love you! Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for me."

Even though we cannot feed you physically we can spiritually and sacramentally and a warm personal invitation and is most assuredly what awaits you at the Assumption of Our Lady live or Streamed.

Deacon Michael