

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday- A 2008  
(Deacon Pat Hall)

Homilies are aids to encountering the living Word.

First, please read the scripture passages that inform this homily:

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalms 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

These readings can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/080308.shtml>

The Feeding of the 5000 is a great miracle in our tradition.

It is one of the few stories that are recorded in all four Gospels.

How do we understand such a miracle?

Webster's says a miracle is an action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws.

It comes from the Latin, *miraculum* 'object of wonder'.

The Feeding of 5000 men and their families with 5 loaves and 2 fish is certainly all of that.

As a person of faith, I accept the prospect of miracles.

As a person of logic, I suspect every miracle I hear about as being some type of scam.

I have heard a number of times stated that the real miracle in that deserted place 2000 years ago was that the crowd was so moved by Jesus' preaching that they shared with each other what meager rations they each had which resulted in surplus left-overs.

This helps with one's suspicion of actions that contradict the laws of reality. It is also a noble message.

This would indeed be something remarkable if it occurred in 21<sup>st</sup> century America at an outdoor concert or an athletic event.

Our culture of rugged individualism asks us to rely on ourselves, often to the point of real want, before we impose on others.

However, the culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Middle-East was very different. The family, the tribe and the group were the most important considerations. Hospitality was the first responsibility and the lack of hospitality was the worst sin.

Such an event, if it was the result of magnanimous sharing, would have been the cultural expectation of the times and certainly would not have inspired such wonder in all of our Gospel writers.

Something happened out there that involved Jesus, his disciples, 5 loaves, 2 fish and 5000 families.

And it created wonder.

I have experienced something like that.

Two years ago, I was driving 6 of our Student Ministry Team members to Madison, WI, the home of the Evangelical Catholic Institute.

In two weeks I will be taking another group of 6 there for faith exploration and leadership building.

On our trip two years ago, we started headed westbound on I-94 and had just gotten past Paw Paw when traffic came to a sudden stand-still.

Traffic was stopped ahead as far as we could see and within minutes, it was backed up behind us to the horizon.

After not moving an inch for 20 minutes or so, our team members bailed out of our stuffy white blue bird special van onto the median.

Frisbees started to be tossed.

A guitar was brought out.

Praise and Worship songs filled the air.

People from other cars got out on foot.

People brought food to share.

We were stuck in traffic for almost 2 hours, but that party in the median with God's name being praised would fill anyone with wonder.

The semi-tractor accident that had caused the back-up was dramatic, but without tragedy.

God was clearly in this quite remarkable event.

So, what is remarkable here?

St. Augustine in his reflection on the Feeding of the 5000 asks the same question.\*

*“The miracles Our Lord wrought are truly divine. And, through what is visible, they lead the mind to the knowledge of God...scarce anyone troubles to reflect on the wondrous and astounding perfection in each single grain of seed...so that they to whom things daily seen evoke no wonder might be awakened to wonder, seeing, not great, but unusual things. For the daily ordering of this whole world is a greater wonder than the feeding of five thousand men from five loaves. Yet at the one no one is astonished, at the other all men marvel: not as at a great happening, but as at a rarer.”*

For St. Augustine, how God was able to raise a barley field from mere seeds is a greater miracle than the miraculous event of 5 loaves and 2 fish feeding 5000.

But this action of Christ, not being more miraculous than God's ordering of nature, does indeed cause us people to marvel and wonder.

It is in wondering, we are brought to God.

When we are challenged to stretch beyond our own limited understanding, we find God's face waiting for us.

If I could explain the miracle, I would extinguish the search for God in it.

Although I can't explain the spontaneous outpouring of people on that median on I-94, I can at least experience it, share it, and appreciate God's action in it.

I may not be able to explain the Feeding of the 5000, but I can appreciate God's action. What was God's action in this?

Jesus said, *"Bring them here to me... Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who **in turn** gave them to the crowds. All ate and were satisfied."*

Where else have we heard similar words?

*"Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take eat; this is my body." (Mt 26:26)*

That was at Jesus' last supper, the eve of his crucifixion.

These are words you hear every week at Jesus' altar.

The wonder of the Feeding of the 5000 is the wonder that is offered at this liturgy.

I insist on believing Fr. Ken when he says that as God's children, we have the right to expect an encounter with our God at every mass.

When you are fed from God's Word, when you receive his true presence from the altar (a wonder that cannot be understood) you are called, just like the disciples back at that deserted place.

And just like those disciples, you are called "in turn" to give to your brothers and sisters whom God sends you... today, tomorrow and this week.

*"Come to me heedfully, listen that you may have life."*

*"Nothing can separate us from the love of God..."*

Come here to wonder... and to share.