

Give them something to eat yourselves (Matthew 14: 13-24 - Feeding of 5000)

We have before us today a real feast of Scripture. It is such a wonderful smorgasbord that it deserves out tasting a little of each of the courses provided.

The prophet Isaiah (55:1) reminds us that the Lord says: Listen to me, and you will have good things to eat. This reminds us of our need to feed on the word of God in Scripture. The Psalm 144 tells us to call on God from our hearts. This reminds us about our need for intentional Prayer. St. Paul (Rom 8:35) offers us those words of great encouragement that nothing can come between us and the love of Christ- nothing can separate us - not persecution, not poverty, not even the death. This reminds us that we can have hope in all the circumstances that we face.

And finally we have that wonderful gospel of Matthew where Jesus feeds the 5000. Jesus was wanting to withdraw to a quiet place for prayer and reflection but the crowds followed. The disciples were the worried about the need for the people to be fed and Jesus makes the extraordinary statement: “ give them something to eat your selves “ - Give them something to eat yourselves! They replied to him that they had only a little. He says to them, offer up the little that you have, and allow me to make it multiply. See how I can multiply whatever you have to offer.

This scene is a forerunner of the millions of Eucharistic meals that will be shared around the world for years to come. People like us, bringing what little we have to offer, and seeing God transform it, to nourish all of God's people.

I know that last week you received some reflections on the World Youth Day activities from our Parish youth. I hope you don't mind me sharing my own reflection on this massive Eucharistic event in the life of Australia - in many ways it is an echo of today's readings.

On Saturday the 19th of July 400,000 followers of Jesus walked from the Sydney Harbour Bridge to Randwick racecourse. It was an amazing pilgrimage event, a sea of humanity, a river of humanity flowing into a place of gathering where we were to sit down on the grass to be fed by Jesus. I hope you saw some of this on television or in the newspapers. We shared the excitement of the crowds following Jesus along the shore of the Sea of Galilee as they came to hear what Jesus had to say.

Our day of singing and meeting people from all over the world was capped off with an evening service of light, where from 1 candle on the altar, beside the pope, other candles were lit, and passed on, until eventually the darkness of the night was replaced by 400,000 glowing lights. I think the original intention of those planning the ceremony was that everyone would receive their light from the original candle, and it would be passed on progressively. What actually happened though, was that people who had some light, lit their candles themselves and started sharing that with those around him. The whole crowd was illuminated very quickly.

It made me wonder at the time, if the same thing happened at the feeding of the 5000. I'm sure that a miracle occurred in Jesus' multiplication of the bread and fish given to him by the disciples. But I wonder whether the generosity and the confidence the disciples showed, encouraged some of the other people in the crowd, to share what they had, with those around them. Could that be a miracle too? When we share what little we've got with those in the need it can be an encouragement for people with surplus, to share that surplus with others.

A literal feeding of the 400,000 came at Randwick on Sunday the 20th Jul when Pope Benedict celebrated the final mass. It was truly a blessed experience to see so many people, from every place on Earth, not just being fed by God through the holy father, but being commissioned by him to go out the ends of the earth to be his witnesses through the power of the Holy Spirit. I really felt this was a time of a new Pentecost in the life of the Church in Australia. The World Youth Day events have received a wonderful public endorsement by the wider community in Australia. They have also given a great spiritual boost to everyone that had any involvement with them, and we can expect good things to come out of it for us as a church. But it will still involve an element of us doing our bit. To continue to offer the gifts that we have to those of our community in need.

The particular desire of Pope Benedict and our Bishops was that World Youth Day would bring about a new springtime of evangelization in our church in Australia. I was challenged on Friday by a young army major just back from Iraq. He is a Christian from another tradition and he said to me: You've really got to be able to follow this up – will you have Catholics who will now come out of complacency and share their faith. I then shared with him how we as a Parish are already planning for reconnecting people with the church and God's mission. I hope everyone might have seen report in the bulletin two weeks ago about our 3 fold plans to develop:

- a greater sense of hospitality of the people currently participating in church,
- how we will further develop our current baptism and sacramental programs to connect more deeply with occasional participants in church,
- and how we will be considering new ways to connect with people who'd never participated in church activities.

There are many many things, that we can do, to live out Pope Benedict's call to us to be God's witnesses the world, and we are going to give it our best shot in this parish. We will be looking for representatives of all parish groups and anyone interested in this mission to come to a meeting on Wednesday 27th of August at 7:30 p.m. at St. Peter Chanel's church to pray and brainstorm ideas, and develop plans for future evangelisation.

I used to think that feeding 5000 people was a pretty major task. Now that I have seen God feed 400,000 people, my vision, and my horizons, have been expanded considerably. We have had something wonderful happen in Australia this last month, and may be that we will look back on this time as the turning point for Christianity this

country. The disciples of Jesus Christ, the Universal Catholic Church is on the move!! We are asked to bring what ever each one of has , what little we have , or what surplus we have and share it with others. And yes we can make a difference . We can transform the world through the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the hearts of the few faithful people. I'm excited about this or I hope you could be excited to.

Last week we heard about some features of the Kingdom of God. This is the kingdom of God becoming present in our time. The people of God coming together and agree that yes we will make a difference. God is with us, we are on his mission This is not just news it's the best news. Our God reigns.