

Loaves and Fishes

Who doesn't like food? Most of us enjoy three meals plus snacks each day. In fact, many of us have to be careful about how much we eat to be sure we maintain a healthy weight and diet. We need food and we enjoy the taste of food—all kinds.

Jesus Feeds the Multitudes

Jesus knew this when he fed 5,000 men and their families stranded in the hills of Judea. Jesus was surrounded by 5,000 people who followed him to hear his wonderful words of life. When the people were filled with his inspiring words, the disciples told Jesus to send the people away so they could find food. The disciples were astonished when Jesus told them they were to feed this huge group themselves.

This event is so significant that all four Evangelists include it in their Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-15). We find in John's Gospel it was a boy—perhaps around your age—who shared the food he had with his Eucharistic generosity.

Perhaps the young boy who had the five loaves and two fish was taking the food home to his family. Or perhaps he was with his family in the group that was listening to what Jesus taught. Maybe the food he had was his lunch. We don't know anything about him except that he had the food—and the little bit of food he had became enough food to feed over 5,000 people. ***That's a miracle.***

Jesus took the boy's five loaves and two fish, gave them to his disciples, and told them to feed the crowd. This seemed impossible. Yet, this small amount of food fed a crowd of over 5,000 people. Not only that! There were 12 baskets of food left over. This event is called the ***Multiplication of the Loaves.***

Jesus is the master of abundance and values the gifts of God; Jesus doesn't waste.

This is an important story because it foretells the Last Supper and the Eucharist. Through the centuries, Jesus has continued to feed multitudes with abundant food for the body and the soul. He feeds us today.

Jesus is fully present to us in the Eucharist; he gives himself to us in abundance. If we are open to him—if we allow ourselves to be nourished by him in body, mind, and heart—he gives to the world abundantly in and through us.

Sharing God's Abundance

Some see the incident of the feeding of the multitude that we read about in the Gospels being prefigured in the Old Testament. In Exodus 16, for example, the Israelites eat manna in the desert—bread from heaven that God provided.

Because God is so generous, we, in turn, are to be generous, and we are blessed when we share. God is pleased with our fasting that includes "sharing your bread with the hungry" (Isaiah 58:7). A person is virtuous if he or she "gives food to the hungry" (Ezekiel 18:7). The kindly person will be blessed because he "gives of his sustenance to the poor" (Proverbs 22:9).

In the New Testament, St. Paul continues the promise of blessings for those who are generous. "Those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly" while "those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully...God loves a cheerful giver...God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:6, 8).

A Generous Measure

Jesus blesses the Church and the world with a generous spirit of giving and sharing. He says, "Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you" (Luke 6:38). A measure so given is generous, abundant, and touches the heart of the one who gives and the one who receives.

Studies have shown that when people receive from the generosity of others, they likely will share what they have as well. Their hearts are touched with the goodness of others, and they realize how important it is to reach out to others. It's like a row of dominoes balanced on end, one right next to the other. When just one domino falls over,

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all the others fall as well. The goodness of sharing is the same way. The first act of sharing leads to another act of sharing that leads to another act of sharing and so on. Have you ever been in a Starbucks or Dunkin' drive thru and the person in front of you pays for your order? Doesn't it put a smile on your face? What's your immediate reaction? "Let me pay for the person behind me!" and that gesture may continue for some time. Just like the dominoes.

Other studies have shown that sharing makes us happier and healthier people. We don't cling to what we have in fear of not having enough for ourselves. Rather, we trust in God's abundant goodness, share what we have with others, and experience a very special kind of joy that is hard to describe.

Our abundant God honored the boy who had the five loaves of bread and two fish; the boy has been remembered for 2,000 years, coming to mind every time we read this part of the Gospel according to John. When we are generous, God can expand the results of our goodness far beyond anything we can imagine. We might be limited in many ways, but there are no limits with God.

This miracle of the loaves prefigured the bread of life, the bread of heaven that Jesus gave to his Apostles at the Last Supper and that he now gives to us at every Mass. The miracle is that Jesus himself is present to us. But it is not only the bread that is transformed; we who receive Jesus in the Eucharist are also transformed by the presence of Jesus around us and in us. That is an even greater miracle! Through this miracle, God transforms the hearts and minds of all those who are open to accepting him, making this a better world with an abundance of peace, love, and joy. Through this miracle, God gathers together people of faith who will live with Jesus in heaven forever.

Loaves and Fish Prayer

Opening Prayer: Loving Creator, Source of All Good, thank you for sending Jesus to teach us how to live in your abundance—generously receiving from you and giving to others. Help us to be aware of his loving presence in Holy Communion and to allow ourselves to be transformed into his presence in the world. **All:** Amen.

Reading: After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee [of Tiberias]. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little [bit]." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone. (John 6:5-15)

Closing Blessing and Prayer: Generous Father in Heaven, thank you for all you give us to feed our bodies, minds, and hearts. Bless this food we have made. May it remind us of your abundant goodness—that you are ready to give us all we need. Fill us with a generous spirit so that we may cheerfully and freely give to others, as the boy gave his food to Jesus.

All: Amen.

Parent Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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