

My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel presents to us the well-known miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, where our Lord transforms nature beyond human understanding. Today, however, I would like to explore an important element of the miracle: compassion.

The Gospel begins with Christ healing a large crowd, and it very clearly says, "...*He had compassion on them...*" (*Matthew 14:14*). Christ, who was both King and Servant of all, did not come to heal the crowd because He wished to be glorified as a great man: He came to demonstrate both the mercy and love that God shows to each and every one of us, and the compassion that we are called to show to our brothers and sisters.

His compassion is further demonstrated later in the Gospel, as the day comes to a close. The Disciples have grown tired of the crowd and worry about the responsibility of feeding these thousands of people who are away from their homes. The Disciples have just spent a long day watching their Master relieve people's illness and burdens. The Disciples lack the Godly compassion and understanding they have seen from our Lord. When they ask Christ to dismiss the crowds, He responds once again with love and concern, "*They need not go away...*" (*Matthew 14:16*).

The miracle has been discussed many times: how He blessed the five loaves and two fish, and how, when the pieces were given, five thousand men—plus women and children—ate and were satisfied. Christ's ability to provide for the needs of many with so little demonstrated His true Divinity, but the Disciples also learned to be more patient, more charitable, and merciful towards their neighbors.

In a way it is a comforting thought, that these first open followers of Christ could have understandable human weaknesses: hunger, exhaustion, and irritability. I pray, that we do not allow these weaknesses to help us sin further, but that we instead think of Christ.

Christ, who as Man surely felt tiredness and hunger, but as God, he saw the state of His creation, and willingly emptied Himself, to demonstrate the kind of behavior our Heavenly Father expects from all of us. For while men may turn away from their neighbors, Christ Himself will always be present, gently saying, "*They need not go away...*"

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta

