

With five loaves and two fish Jesus fed five thousand. Had he lived in modern times; the size of the crowd would have been much larger. 18 years ago, I attended World Day in Toronto as one of 54 people from the Diocese of Fairbanks including a reporter from KNOM Radio in Nome in order to help bridge the distance back to rural Alaska.

From Canada and around the world, 800,000 people gathered for Sunday morning Mass with Pope John Paul II. As dawn broke that morning, the wind picked up, and the clouds opened up with a deluge of rain. But as Mass began the sun peeked through the clouds and the rain stopped. The healing power of the sun warmed everyone and halted the exodus of people seeking shelter from the rain.

Following the Pope's homily in which he challenged the young to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, the gifts were brought forward to the altar. Instead of five loaves and two fish, bread and wine were brought forward along with the prayers and hopes and aspirations of the 100's of thousands who were present and those watching through broadcast television or listening over the radio.

Taking the bread and wine, and looking up to heaven, John Paul II said the blessing, in unison with hundreds of bishops and thousands of priests. He broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples, who in turn fed the multitude. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—more than twelve wicker baskets full. The number of worshippers that morning was 160 times greater than the five thousand whom Jesus fed.

The multiplication of the loaves from World Youth Day is the same miracle celebrated each weekend wherever two or three are gathered in his name. We hear Christ's teaching in the word that is proclaimed. Then bread and wine are brought forward along with your prayers and hopes and aspirations. Taking the bread and wine, and looking up to heaven, the priest as an Icon of Jesus says the blessing, breaks the bread, and gives it to the crowds. Come rain or shine, winter's snow or summer's heat, Jesus offers his body in sacrifice for us. We in turn are to offer ourselves to others. You are the human face of Jesus commissioned through your baptism to bring Christ to your neighbor.

We live in different and difficult times. Many are afraid to gather in great numbers. Others have

thrown caution to the wind. Among the elderly, there has been great caution, and few have caught the virus. But if infected, the elderly are at the greatest risk of dying. Those who are younger and healthier, have a much lower risk of death, but because of that lack of caution and because of greater freedom of movement, there is a much higher rate of being infected and passing the virus on to others. The pandemic has made it more difficult to gather for worship, but gather we must, using masks, cleansing our hands, staying 6 feet away from others outside our household. And where age or ailment keep us homebound, this is where you can be a good neighbor and call and speak and reach out to the isolated.

Our Gospel today starts with the death of John the Baptist. He lived an austere life and preached a message of repentance. People were hungering for God and came in great numbers to be baptized in the Jordan River. He died a martyr's death for rebuking Herod Antipas's unlawful marriage to Herodias. Hearing of John's death, Jesus withdrew in prayer but the crowds followed him. They were hungering for God, thirsting for healing.

We need God in our lives. More than ever, we are restless and agitated. We need the peace of Christ to calm us. When we are hungering and never satisfied, we are searching for God. Sadly, we turn in so many different directions looking for something that will fill the void ... respond to the thirst. To paraphrase Saint Augustine, 'Our hearts will always be restless until they rest in God.' In the words of our psalmist praising God, "you open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16). In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? ... Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant" (Is. 2a, 3b).