

Jesus is concerned for the crowd of 5,000 for they are like sheep without a shepherd. He begins to teach them. In our own circumstances, whatever they may be, we can feel overwhelmed. If we prayerfully bring our concerns to Jesus and listen carefully, we might see a path forward with the help of Jesus and the Holy Spirit through prayer and discernment.

The disciples feel a bit overwhelmed. They suggest that Jesus “Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat” (Mk 6:36). Many times, we may feel like the disciples thinking the only way is to let others fend for themselves.

I recall a woman approaching me at a busy train station in Chicago. She was hungry and wanted some money to buy food. I took her to a nearby shop and paid for a meal for her. She looked at the price of the meal and felt she would have been better off with the money so she could have gone to a grocery store and seen the money stretch much farther. My solution, like that of the disciples was not really a practical one. When our own attempts fall flat, this is another sign that we need to turn to Jesus for the answer rather than rely on our own efforts.

“The people took their places in rows by hundreds and by fifties” (Mk 6:40). The way the people sit in groups for Jesus is reminiscent of the way the Israelites set up camp in the desert. We recall that Moses felt burdened by the weight of his responsibilities and so his father-in-law offered him some advice. “You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone” (Ex 18:18). So, Moses divided his duties and shared them among other’s in groups of hundreds and fifties, so he only dealt with the more serious matters. As we continue to modify our routines to deal with the pandemic, I am sure many people can sympathize with Moses and his sense of exhaustion. Perhaps there is some merit in finding others to help us cope with the many demands placed upon us.

“Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all” (Mk 6:41). The actions and words of Jesus remind us of what happens at Mass. The priest takes the gifts that have been brought forward by the community and looks to heaven as he says the blessing. Instead of bread and fish, Jesus offers us his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. Jesus feeds us with the Bread of Life.

As we contemplate Jesus in Holy Communion, it is helpful to recall several of his teachings:

- “Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (Jn 6:27).
- “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51).