

We live in strange times. On Tuesday, billionaire Jeff Bezos, flew to the edge of space. The week before, Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson rocketed into space on his own aircraft. While we applaud their effort, there is an underlying current to great advances in technology. Science alone has all the answers, and we need not be so dependent on God for our daily bread.

Let us return to the simpler apostolic times. Jesus asks Phillip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" (Jn 6:5). Philip guesses it would take 200 days wages to feed the 5,000 but he doesn't try to answer the question that Jesus asked. There was no place to go and obtain the food necessary to feed 5,000 people. The Lord alone can supply.

Andrew said to Jesus, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" (Jn 6:9). Barley loaves were the food of the common people. "Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted" (6:11). This is an extremely poor year for subsistence fishing. Many are rightly concerned of hard times to come with so few fish available. Will Jesus not see us through these difficult times?

"The LORD is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

The LORD watches over all who love him... My mouth will speak the praises of the LORD; all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever" (Ps 145:18-20a, 21a).

I am reminded of the Vietnamese Bishop who was held captive under house arrest during the war. He felt an obligation to feed his flock. He could not celebrate Mass publicly, but he found a way to feed people with the Word of God. He would meditate and pray over the scriptures and then jot down his inspired thoughts on the back of a page a day calendar. Each day when a young person came to bring him his daily meal, he would send his thought of the day out to be delivered to a trusted aid. The meditations were collected into the book *Five Loaves and Two Fish*.

Discovering the ingenious way that the bishop fed his flock, his communist captors moved him to a prison where he was watched day and night. There is a saying, 'one soul is diocese enough for a bishop.' Bishop Francis Xavier converted many a guard by living a life of joy despite the harshest conditions and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with his captors.

Where do we find the strength, where do we find the faith? On top of the many shortages, the new Delta Variant still threatens the world. People are weary, they want freedom. They want it all to end. The Lord alone is the answer to our weariness.

Let me share another story. This too from a man of God who was physically and mentally exhausted after an international trip to Kyoto, Japan. He was used to meditating on the Word of God through the practice of *Lectio Divina*. He sat down and began to meditate. His bible was not readily available, so he sat before a picture of life in ancient Japan. Spiritually, he engaged the picture for 45 minutes as he practiced a prayerful form of contemplation. The time in prayer, rejuvenated him. He arose from his seated position and felt more energetic than if he had a long nap to shake off his weariness.

In the desert, the Israelites feared starvation. God answered their prayers by providing manna in the desert. But the manna was perishable. They could only pick enough to eat for their daily bread. At weeks end, so they could properly observe the sabbath, they could pick enough for two days. Unlike the manna, Jesus orders his disciples to gather the bread fragments so that they will not perishⁱ. The bread that Jesus gives is meant to nourish us in a way that manna alone cannot.

"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).

ⁱ Martin, Francis; Wright, William M. IV. *The Gospel of John (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture)* (p. 115).