

What and who did Jesus see as he looked out at the “large crowd” that had followed him and his disciples to the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee?

The answer given last weekend in the Gospel story from St. Mark, immediately preceding his account of the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, stated: “(Jesus’) saw the vast crowd, (and) his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk. 6:34). St. John as he prepares to tell his version of the same miracle adds a further detail, “a large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick” (Jn. 6: 2).

Here we have the “field hospital” the image Pope Francis employs to describe the ministry of Jesus and the Church. St. John tells us that the Jewish feast of Passover was near” (Jn 6: 4). Passover, originally a spring harvest festival, in time was twinned with the story of Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, freedom and covenant relationship with God through Moses in the Exodus story and became the greatest of Jewish feasts. What Jesus is about to do prefigures the new exodus, the new and eternal Passover, the New Covenant to be accomplished in his Passover, his passion, death, resurrection and glorification which will heal the “sin of the world” our original woundedness to which we look to God for healing, which he will ultimately link with bread and wine at the Last Supper, establishing the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist; eternal medicine for the soul.

Jesus sees a hungry crowd—not only for physical food (which one other of the evangelists tells us had been with him for a couple of days). Jesus sees the physical hunger but even more to the deeper (and even greater) spiritual hunger. Jesus saw the many then, and sees now, in our world, country and here in Ames who lack the means to access physical food on a regular basis. Jesus saw the immigrant and refugees common in Israel in his day as people fled oppressive kings, dictators and lived under the reality of terrorism in their homelands then, just as countless of our brothers and sisters do today, seeking a place of shelter, security and peace, for themselves and their families. Jesus saw and sees the

abused and battered spouse and/or child crying out for consolation, justice and healing. Jesus saw and sees the person struggling to establish their self-image, to reconcile their sexual orientation, to find a faith-path to guide their life. Jesus saw and sees sinners seeking a word of forgiveness to set them free from the prison of guilt. Jesus saw and sees the sick, the disabled, and all who lack access to medical care seeking healing. Jesus saw and sees the young and old poor, abandoned and/or scorned by society pushed to the peripheries of life by the powerful. Jesus saw and sees them all. Jesus sees us with those same eyes in our own “hungers” and “his heart [is] moved with pity.”

And then, Jesus acts. There’s no possible human way to satisfy such hunger. Only an act of God will do. Jesus, the divine Son of God, is not blind or deaf to the “cry of the poor” acts. A small child, one of us, comes forward and offers a little bread and some fish, all that he has. It will be enough. Jesus takes the little offering and through divine grace provides bread to feed the hungry crowd.

Jesus’ action is a model for the disciples and us. We may not have the resources to satisfy the many hungers of the world. Yet, like the boy in the story, each of us does have some bread materially and spiritually; our time, talent, financial treasure. Jesus’ gesture is a call to action. Jesus calls us to take, bless, break and share our bread. One-person fed is one less hungry individual. He or she who saves one life, saves the world, an old Jewish proverb state. The smallest gesture—food brought to our monthly food collection; a word of encouragement, forgiveness, acceptance, offered in a written note, a tweet; time given sitting and being present and listening to the heart story of another; reading, learning and then acting on the body of the Church’s social teaching rather than mouthing partisan political rhetoric—these, and more, are bread, through which we feed the hungry faces into which we gaze before us.

Our bread, too, offered to God and given to others, like in the Gospel, not only can feed others but used by God results in abundance, even left overs.

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