

I am sure many of you are familiar with the movie *Forrest Gump*. If you know the story, you will remember the part where Forrest begins running. As he runs and runs and runs, a crowd begins to follow him, and the people cannot seem to get enough of what they see as they watch him continue to run. Then, at one point, Forrest simply decides he is done running and it is time to stop and go home. When that happens, one person in the perplexed crowd asks, “What will we do? What will we do?”

What will we do? This is the question we find in today’s gospel reading. Today’s gospel passage, the feeding of the 5,000, is the **only** miracle story found in all **four** of the gospels. And, it is found **twice** in two of the gospels. So, that means it is quite important and this question is significant. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, when faced with the perplexing problem of feeding so many people, the **disciples** are the ones to ask Jesus the question, “What will we do?” But, as we read John’s version of this story, we discover there is a major twist in the tale. In John’s gospel we hear **Jesus** asking **Philip**, “What will we do?”

Jesus has been continually moving through Galilee doing the work of ministry – teaching, speaking words of hope, and healing people. The crowds begin to follow him around because of the miraculous healings they

have seen. And, in today's story, 5,000+ people follow him up a mountain wanting to see more of his astonishing healing power. Jesus surveys the crowd and, already knowing what he is going to do, **he** is the one who asks Philip this test question, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? They are hungry. So, what are we going to do?" Jesus is the one who asks the disciples and, by extension, asks the likes of each one of us, "What are we going to do? How are we going to deal with this problem of hunger?"

Hunger is a universal experience. From the moment we enter this world we are faced with hunger. Hunger is something we all know and understand. We all feel it when our bellies are empty. We all know what that incessant feeling is like when hunger always returns, and our bodies need nourishment. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once said, "The belly is an ungrateful wretch, it never remembers past favors, it always wants more tomorrow." Hunger propels us to that which gives us life, that which we quite literally cannot live without.

Well, when Jesus asks Phillip this question, Philip responds quite logically and rationally. He begins to calculate how much money they would need to buy supper for all five thousand plus people. He replies, "Half a year's paychecks won't do the trick. Our budget just is not big

enough. Our resources are just too few.” However, Jesus knows that conventional, logical answers are not what is needed and called for in this situation.

Then, Andrew looks around, and he does a practical survey of the situation to figure out what is available. He comes to Jesus saying, “Well, there is someone here, a kid with five barley loaves and a couple of fish.” The very sensible Andrew tells Jesus that what is available is the lunch of a boy, someone who is not a power broker, someone who has no social rank or standing. We know this because barley flour is the flour that poor folks used to make **their** loaves of bread. The rich did **not** use barley. In Andrew’s words we get the sense that real needs are not necessarily filled by the folks to whom we often look for help, those who have much. And, as John continues to tell this story, it becomes very clear that **Jesus himself** is the **only** One who can end real hunger – hunger of **every** kind, not just the sort of hunger that makes for growling stomachs at lunchtime. John makes this **very** clear because in his telling of this story, this miracle takes place near the time of Passover and **Jesus, himself**, becomes the host of the meal. **Jesus** is the one who distributes the food. In the other gospels, it is the **disciples** who take up the work of distributing the food, but in John, something else is going on. Jesus, himself, is the one who feeds the 5,000

plus people. And, in John's telling of this story, after Jesus feeds the crowd he tells the disciples, "Gather up the fragments so that **nothing** is *lost*." This is important. The Greek word used for *lost* really means **perishing**. Jesus' real purpose is to keep people from getting lost, from perishing, and to provide nourishment that lasts and keeps us truly alive.

John's placement of this story near the time of Passover where Jesus serves as host is very intentional because it is Jesus himself who will **become** the real food. In fact, in just a few verses, the verses we will hear in next week's gospel, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never hunger." Jesus is saying, "**I am** the real food, the most important food. Don't spend your lives on food that spoils. Don't stock the shelves of your life with perishables. Put **me** there instead. Make **me** your staple, the food that is going to last. When you are hungry, reach first for me."

I have no doubt that you will experience some form of hunger today. And, I have no doubt that many of us have a gnawing hunger within that food alone will not fill. We try to fill that void by shopping and buying more stuff. We try to fill that hunger through travel. We try to fill that hunger by striving for success. We even try to fill that hunger by pushing our kids to achieve **extreme** success so they can then push their kids to do the same

thing – and the cycle spirals on and continues through generations. We try to fill the emptiness within through a whole variety of addictions, whether it be alcohol, drugs, video games, food, sex, gambling, or whatever. Even those who have more money than anyone else in the world and seem to have everything they could possibly need have this deep hunger. So, they try to fill that hunger by doing absurd things like compete with the other richest people in the world to fly into space, all for their own personal pleasure. However, **everything** we human beings do in our attempts to fill that void within is **always, always, always** going to leave us empty and starving again. It really is all futile and will never fill the emptiness we feel.

So, I ask each of you, what are you really hungry for? How are you hungry? And, how are you trying to fill the emptiness within? God really cares about your answers to these questions. God cares about your hunger and God is calling you to Jesus' table of life where you can feast on this bread called Jesus, a food that is very strange indeed. It is strange because we consume this Jesus food and take it into ourselves as ordinary bread. We digest this Jesus food, and it becomes part of us. But this bread, this life of Jesus, does something that ordinary bread does not do. You see, when we consume this bread, ***Jesus begins to consume us.*** When we consume the bread at this table, the broken body of Jesus makes

us a part of himself. And, when we consume this bread, **we** become food for a broken world – **we** become broken, living loaves of bread.

People of God, Jesus, the one who became broken and went to the cross out of love for this world, stands before us and he is saying to each one of us, “What are you gonna do? Feed on **me**, feed **on my very life**. **I am** the **real** food that matters, and **I am** the one who will truly **satisfy** your hungry heart. I am **more** than enough and there is **abundance** as I give you my very life. Come and feast on my banquet of life!”