

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jul 29th 2018

The episodes involving Elisha in the first reading, and Jesus in the Gospel both focus on a miraculous feeding of a multitude. They clearly set the stage for the Bread of Life passage that follows nearly sequentially in John's Gospel. However, my reflection on these readings has taken me in a different direction. The Psalm response is: The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs. I am moved to consider the second part of that response.

The feeding of the thousands is an event that can be found in all four Gospels. In all four, Jesus is being followed by the crowd. It seems as if he was trying to get away and needed to have some quiet time. I picture Jesus as tired. (In some distant sense I can relate to what Jesus is feeling. I have two 8-months-old grandchildren. I love them dearly, but at the end of a day of babysitting, they can leave me in need of rest.)

Jesus does not become irritable as I might do when I am tired. (My view is that Jesus' question to Phillip appears in the Gospel text more to make the point of the magnitude of the event, rather than as a glib enquiry.)

Both Mark's and Matthew's narratives of this same Gospel event are directly preceded by an account of the death of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. If I were in Jesus' place, I would feel shock, depression, and worry about my own future. I would definitely need some downtime.

I feel the truly impressive part of the Gospel account is that Jesus does not give up. He addresses the needs of those around him. (Again, I find myself thinking about my grandchildren. After a long day, when two babies are hungry, you take the time to feed them whether you are tired or not.) My takeaway from today's passages is twofold. First, we can trust in the Lord even in hard times. Second, we have a model for our own actions in a Messiah who continues to serve those around him - no matter what. My prayer today is for the strength that I need to respond faithfully to those around me in times of my own pain and exhaustion.

Heavenly Father,

I know the weariness that long stretches of hard work can cause.

I am also well aware of the state of lethargy that times of despair can bring.

Thank you for the model of Your Son carrying on in hard times.

In the moments when I am tired help me to avoid criticizing and judging.

I ask for a second wind on the days when I am hurt and down.

I ask that fatigue does not displace the joy and meaning that flows from service to others.

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