

Nothing offered in prayer is ever small in God's sight!

Is anyone of us here allergic to fish? not vegans but those who are allergic to fish. Please show your hands up..... If not, do you know of anyone allergic to fish? Again, show up your hands.....

In our gospel reading last Sunday, we heard Jesus was rejected by the people in his own hometown of Nazareth because he was too familiar to them. However, they wondered where he got his extraordinary wisdom.

Jesus for his part did little wonders among them. His mission was threatened. His situation was made worse when he learnt his forerunner, John the Baptist who was arrested and jailed, had been persecuted.

Being human with human feelings, this was a very difficult - grieving time for Jesus. It required a retreat to a quiet place, to reflect in solitude. This way he could seek the Father's counsel and guidance, to receive a clear sense of direction for the journey ahead for the Father's mission, to which he was sent to fulfill.

This is what we hear in our gospel, that Jesus goes to a deserted place for his much-needed refreshment in solitude.

Jesus' previous divine influence though, did not escape the needs of a multitude of people who traced his whereabouts and followed him with their varied needs.

In our gospel to which we now turn, Jesus sees the people's immediate need and out of compassion he turns to them. He foregoes his own personal need for rest, prayer and reflection and selflessly responds to the people by curing the sick among them - a multitude I suppose.

Jesus being the Messiah, in his compassionate love for the congregation opposed the disciples' idea of sending the crowd away to meet their own daily needs for survival.

He tasked them to do something for his guests. He accepts the little food – the 5 loaves and 2 fish and prayed for the heavenly Father to intervene in the situation.

The Father then responds to his beloved Son's prayer by immediately multiplying the loaves and fish for a lavish nourishment.

We can understand that the 5 loaves signify the heavenly bread of angels or Manna that God poured out upon the children of Israel in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses.

But why is fish involved in this story and not wine if this was a form of holy communion? We may ask.

To give you a bit of background, Jesus' core disciples – the 'cabinet team' (Peter, James and John) were fishermen called out of their profession to fish out people for God's kingdom.

In his first resurrection appearance as recorded in Luke's gospel, Jesus ate fish in their presence to prove he was real and to fish them back into their vocation.

Also as written in John's gospel, when his disciples were falling back to their fishing business, Jesus intervenes. He suddenly appears, prepares a charcoal fire and eats fish with them at the beach, reminding them of their core ministerial call.

The two fish Jesus blesses and feeds a multitude is never incidental. It is a pointer to a greater reality ahead. It is a foretaste of the end time banquet when all believers will be gathered into the household of God to commune with him forever.

This is indicated in the 12 baskets representing the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 disciples of Jesus in that end time gathering who will include all faithful believers.

We can now understand that perhaps, fish is an important meal in our end time banquet.....that's why I asked you earlier if you know of anyone allergic to fish.

As a foretaste of our ingathering as the household of God in our eucharist, I have often wondered if we should have bread and fish to share. However, it doesn't matter.

All we are doing is representative of God's command especially the very command he instituted for us to share bread and wine in remembrance of him - in his last supper.

The number of people fed was far beyond 5,000. There were 5,000 men and when we consider the total number including women and children who were unfortunately not counted, typical of that male-dominated society, it is probable between 10,000 to 15,000 people were fed. We can imagine what the little two fish and 5 loaves accomplished.

Reflecting on an important family event in Uganda in 2024 attended by a multitude of people, my family and I were initially worried as to how we would cater for the needs of the people gathered.

As it turned out, there was an abundant supply of food. The event has since then remained a talk of the local population to this day.

The disciples' offer of the little food, out of generosity, opened the floodgates of heaven for an abundant supply of nourishment.

This teaches us no matter how small, how insignificant in our sight, our offer to support to others especially those in need, if given freely in prayer, God can do the extra-ordinary.

This includes and is not limited to, God getting hold of us, to experience and witness, as a foretaste to the heavenly abundance in God's kingdom.

The Lord be with you.