

“He took, blessed, broke, and gave.” (Homily)

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June 23, 2019 -- The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ -- Luke 9:11b-17

This weekend, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the ordination of Father Frank O'Hara, our beloved senior priest. And could it be more fitting that we do so on The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, when we celebrate our Lord's feeding of the 5000 -- a miracle in which Father Frank, himself, has participated over the course of a lifetime?

Allow me to explain the connection, beginning with the miracle itself, a miracle distinctive both in its enormity and in its curious details -- details which have provoked many an interesting question throughout the ages, and whose answers -- though very rough, as they must be when one confronts a great mystery -- have helped define core priestly duties over two millennia.

Consider these questions, for example, which may have arisen in your own minds:

Why did the Lord not simply collect sacks from the crowd, and fill them with bread? After all, He had done as much at the wedding feast at Cana.

Why did the Lord command the apostles, "Give them some food yourselves?"

Why was the Lord satisfied, when in reply to His command, the apostles produced a paltry five loaves and two fish? Why did He not demand more from the twelve?

Why did the Lord command the twelve to organize the crowd into small groups?

And why were the leftovers collected? Couldn't the people have taken their crusts home?

So curious, and yet so important, these details -- and the questions they provoke -- that all four evangelists recorded them for posterity. They believed -- as we should -- that everything God does is purposeful, that every command from Jesus is worthy of meditation, that every word from the mouth of God is precious. Now, presented as we are today with these curious details, what shall we make of them?

Why did Jesus not simply collect sacks from the crowd, and fill them with bread?

Perhaps, because the Lord's intent was not only to feed the crowd, but to teach the twelve, preparing them for a future in which he would no longer be walking with them.

Why did the Lord command the apostles, "Give them some food yourselves?"

Perhaps, so that the twelve would feel the awesome responsibility of the shepherd, not only to lead, but to feed his sheep in times of want, to protect them in times of danger.

Why was the Lord satisfied, when in reply to His command, the apostles produced a paltry five loaves and two fish? Why did He not demand more from the twelve?

Perhaps, because this is all they had. It was their supper, their daily bread. Perhaps because the twelve gave all they had for others, even as the Lord had taught them.

Why did the Lord command the twelve to organize the crowd into small groups?

Perhaps, because there was more than one miracle in the wind. Perhaps, because the Lord not only fed the crowd, but also called them to share of their own provisions.

Consider: We were made for one another, and when the Lord gathers us in small groups, in families and in parishes, we come to know one another's needs, and are better able to meet them. The Lord provides! But frequently, He does so by calling us to share with one another.

Finally, why were the leftovers collected? Couldn't the people have taken their crusts home?

Perhaps, because by collecting the leftovers, the crowd was invited to share from their abundance -- to tithe, even as Abram had tithed, in today's Old Testament reading.

And so I put this question to you about our beloved senior priest, Father Frank:

Has he not recreated the feeding of the 5000, week after week, for a lifetime? Consider:

Has he not obeyed the Lord's command, "Give them some food yourself?"

Has he not invited us to bring our loaves to God's altar? Has he not accepted them?

Has he not built parish communities with his steady leadership? Has he not healed parish communities with his gentle and loving presence?

Has he not taken our loaves in his hands, blessed them, broken them, and given them to his disciples to set before us? Has he not fed us bread from heaven?

Has he not called us to share with one another?

Has he not invited us to share with others from our abundance?

Now, the gifts we have just enumerated would have been enough for us, would they have not? But Father Frank gave us more -- *much more*. He gave us himself. He allowed himself to be taken up into the Lord's hands, to be blessed, to be broken (of all worldly ambitions, all worldly pride), so that he might be given to us, as an unfailing, courageous, and loving shepherd.

Ad multos annos, pius pater! (Towards many years, saintly father!)

Luke 9:11b-17

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God,
and he healed those who needed to be cured.

As the day was drawing to a close,
the Twelve approached him and said,

"Dismiss the crowd
so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms
and find lodging and provisions;
for we are in a deserted place here."

He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves."

They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have,
unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people."

Now the men there numbered about five thousand.

Then he said to his disciples,
"Have them sit down in groups of about fifty."

They did so and made them all sit down.

Then taking the five loaves and the two fish,
and looking up to heaven,
he said the blessing over them, broke them,
and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

They all ate and were satisfied.

And when the leftover fragments were picked up,
they filled twelve wicker baskets.