



## Things to Ponder

- [About the Author](#)
- [Order](#)
- [About the Book](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Readers' Comments](#)
- [News & Events](#)
- [A Prayer for the Day](#)
- [Things To Shout Out!](#)
- [Things to Ponder](#)
- [My Favorite Quotes](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Home](#)

## Homily Reflections – Gospel of Matthew 14:13-21

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### Introduction: Sharing From My Meager Limitations

This weekend we jump ahead to our reading of Matthew's Gospel to Chapter 14. Last week we heard Jesus conclude his discourse with the crowds about the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew's narrative, Jesus then leaves the crowds and returns to Nazareth, where he is rejected. Matthew then recounts the story of John the Baptist's arrest and execution at the hands of Herod. This weekend's Gospel reading begins at this point.

Upon hearing the news of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus seeks to withdraw, but the crowds follow him. Even in grief with the tragic death of his beloved cousin and mentor, Jesus finds the strength—and time!—to reach out to them in compassion (“suffer-with”) and heals the sick and wounded. *Perhaps his brokenness and grief were springboards for his caring of those also broken and in grief?*

Then, at the end of a very long and tiring day, the disciples encourage Jesus to send the crowds away so that they might find provisions (a meal; perhaps accommodations for the night?) for themselves. Jesus again responds with compassion for the hungry and tired crowd. Jesus tells his disciples to provide food for the large crowd of people. The disciples reply that they only have meager and limited provisions: five loaves and fish. That's it! And yet the result is the very familiar miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Matthew's Gospel tells us that 5,000 men were fed—and this number does not even include all the women and children—perhaps another 15,000 – 20,000 people! 25,000 people fed with “meager provisions!” Now that's a miracle!

Jesus' blessing (most probably a prayer of thanksgiving) brought abundance from the meager provisions of the disciples. In this action, Jesus offers you and me today a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven that he has been teaching about in the parables of the past few Sunday readings. A feast results from the smallest of portions – remember the mustard seed and the yeast. *In this miracle, we witness an example of Christian life and ministry. Even the smallest of offerings can produce abundant results when placed in the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. Have you ever felt small? Insignificant?*

Amazingly, we find this story of Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and the fish in each of the four Gospels. Why is it so emphasized and repeated? The story of this miracle is an anticipation of the Eucharist (another meal; certainly a feast!) in which you and I are fed by the abundant grace of God. *The question is left hanging for us today: Is the Eucharist a defining meal—a feast—for our Christian life today? Is it “food for our journey?”*

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the *Gospel of Matthew*

14:13-21:

What words or words caught your attention?

What in this passage comforted you?

What in this passage challenged you?

Further Reflections, Questions, Exercises:

Often, you and I can complain—even feel totally overwhelmed!—by the seemingly endless demands for our time and attention. We may be exhausted, sad, or perhaps worried about things. Jesus understood these all-too-human feelings and taught us to see beyond our limitations. Jesus modeled for us a compassion that reaches out to others – even when we would rather withdraw into ourselves. *Can you identify a time when you felt like this? What did you do? How did you handle it?*

This great miracle took place at the end of the day, when folks wanted to return home. Yet, Jesus asked all to trust him, to “sit down” on the grass, and not hurry along. Those who trusted got more than they even bargained for! *Do I “sit down” in trust in a moment of crisis? Identify a time. What happened?*

A concluding question to ponder: *Where in my life are there opportunities to “share my food” (talents, time, treasure) so others will have enough?*

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