

Somewhere in the world this weekend someone is preaching what Fr. Benedict Groeschel calls the “Soggy Fish Sandwich” homily. Maybe you have heard it before. It goes something like this: “Well you know, Jesus really didn’t *create* more bread and fish. He was just such a *good guy* that He *inspired* the people to share the bread and fish they had brought for themselves. This sharing is the *real* miracle.”

This is a very popular interpretation of this Gospel. On one hand, it seems to present several advantages. It seems to give the Gospel credibility in a secular world that cannot or will not believe in the supernatural. In this interpretation Jesus respects the laws of physics and so science is satisfied. Humanists are satisfied because He acts, perhaps more honorably than we might in the same situation, but it is certainly possible for us to do the same.

It seems to offer a healthy exhortation to practicing Christians like you and I to be more generous, to share from our abundance with those in need. The message of sharing is a good one. Those who have are sometimes the only ones that can help those who do not have.

On the other hand, this idea that Jesus did not transform, did not perform a miracle risks turning the Gospel into something much less than it is meant to be..... and there are real ramifications to this type of thought.

Let’s think about what it would mean for us today, if Jesus didn’t really feed the five thousand through miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes.

What if any part of this event was different than the Evangelists tell it?

The Apostles say to our Savior, “We can’t feed them, **let’s tell them to go and get food from the towns and villages!**” If Jesus had done this it would mean that our Lord could send the faithful, could send us, away, even in our hour of need. It would be as though He were saying, **“I can’t feed you, I can’t sustain you, I can’t console you; go to the towns, that is, go into the world and seek whatever comforts you can find there!”** Frankly, I have no use for a God that would say or do such a thing. And I don’t think anyone else would as well. We can get that for ourselves.

But Jesus doesn't send them or us away does He? No, like the Good Shepherd of the Psalms, He leads us to sit on the cool grass and He feeds us, He meets our needs.

Let us consider for a moment what it would have meant **if the people simply shared amongst themselves**, as if Jesus had not multiplied the loaves miraculously.

If that is what happened, then **who was feeding whom?**

Would anyone have been fed by Jesus? No! Jesus NOT feeding the multitudes would mean that our Lord was nothing more than a *moral example* that led the crowd to take care **of themselves**. Why, this would mean that, for us today, the good Lord would be nothing more than a memory from the past. Jesus would be a slave to nature instead of its master and maker, a person who **inspires** us, but not a Savior who actually redeems us! He would be a prophet but not a king, an enlightened one, but not the Son of God.

This miracle is very important, so important that it is the only one recorded in all four of the Gospels. So what are the positive implications? Let us look at what Scripture tells us.

We notice that Jesus ascends the mountain with his disciples and sits down. Now any Jew would have immediately recognized the image of a rabbi surrounded by his disciples. Jesus is in the act of teaching. Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God.

He first gives them the Good News for their hearts and minds and souls and only after He has taught them does He give them bread to sustain them.

How does He give them the bread? It is done in a very specific way:

Jesus takes the gift of bread, he gives thanks and he gives the bread.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, he gave thanks and he gave.

On the road to Emmaus, he spoke to two disciples about the meaning of the Scriptures.

Then they stopped at an inn, where Jesus took bread, gave thanks and gave. The disciples recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

It is worth mentioning one other thing about this Gospel. Jesus performs the miracle, BUT it is the Apostles who distribute the food, just as it was the Apostles who were the first to receive the Body and Blood of Christ at the Last Supper.

And it is through the Apostles that Jesus continues His earthly mission that, in its most simple form can be summed up in: to take what He gives us, to give thanks, and to give. Feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, educating the young is what the Church does! It is what we do as one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

And we do it in the power and grace of the Eucharist.

Both the teaching on the mountain and the multiplication of the loaves are meant to point us to the Mass.

We gather as disciples to hear the rabbi teach through the Scriptures from **this mountain** in the Liturgy of the Word.

Then Our Lord takes portions of simple bread and wine, the things of our labor and He transforms them in a miraculous way. Through the words of the priest, Jesus himself speaks the words of the Last Supper, Jesus Himself speaks at the table in Emmaus and on this mountain.

The priest, not in the place of Christ, but in the **person** of Christ takes the gifts we offer, gives thanks and gives them back to us after they have been changed.

The flesh is eaten, the blood is consumed, and the life of grace that proceeds through them is without end and we are transformed in a miraculous way.

Then we gather up the fragments with great reverence into golden baskets and place them in tabernacles so that the sick and the dying and the homebound might receive what we have received, so that we might stop in and just spend time here with the Lord.

But this Eucharist does not end here. Now **we** take what we have been given, in a spirit of thanksgiving and we give, or we bring the Bread of Life, now a part of us, to the world that so desperately needs it.

That is why the miracle was real and not some parlor trick. If Jesus cannot transform or renew creation in the form of bread and fish, bread and wine, then death WOULD hold Him in the grave, death could not be conquered and we would have..... the world would have... no hope.