

Trinity 11, Year A, Proper 13

Isaiah 55:1-5
Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:13-21

Several themes:

- Jesus went off on his own – the importance of solitude.
- Crowds: Jesus was always followed by large crowds of people.
- Feeding the hungry.

Solitude and its importance for refreshment, especially when we've had bad news, as Jesus just had (John Baptist's death) is something that I've covered recently in *Rambling Rector*, so apart from this brief mention, I'm not doing it today.

But crowds I am doing. Jesus was always followed by crowds of people in his public ministry. Some folk think of Jesus as a solitary preacher, a recluse or a hermit. He's none of these. He's not an arm-chair rabbi. He's a man of the people. He's seen at home, in synagogues, at temple festivals, at weddings and funerals and by sick beds. He watches farmers sow seed, he watches seeds grow, he watches how birds of the air behave, and how children play. He eats with publicans, sinners and prostitutes.

Who are the people who followed Jesus?

- Some have lost their land.
- Some are feeling the burden of heavy taxation.
- Some are oppressed by Roman cruelty.
- Some are alienated from established religion.
- Some are sick, hungry and thirsty.
- Some are despised: lepers, tax collectors, lunatics.
- Some are homeless, destitute, and marginalized.

All need restoration to fullness of life, and know they do, and ask for help.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is censorious about very little, but always, always about hypocrisy, pretence, complacency. Jesus is scathing about sanctimonious religious leaders. He criticizes political leaders. He finds fault with his disciples. But he's never angry or annoyed with the people. He doesn't tell them they're poor because they're lazy. He doesn't tell them that they're being punished for their sin. He doesn't tell them that public money shouldn't be spent on them.

Jesus knows very well that folk who follow him are not saints, and that they don't follow him purely for spiritual reasons. That's you and me! He also knows that very often they're in that situation because good things in life have been taken away from them by the powerful who amass for themselves economic, political and cultural power and position at the expense of others.

Sounds familiar?

When Jesus sees the crowd, his heart is moved with compassion. In Holy Scripture, 'compassion' is a strong word. In Greek it means heart to heart. Our heart takes upon itself the suffering of the other: it's now more ours than the other person's. We carrying the other's burden.

How do we show compassion?

- Sympathy/empathy (what is the difference?)
- Trying to understand one another
- (Psalm and Epistle)
- Feeding the hungry metaphorically: doing for them something that will lessen their burden and grief.

And here is the third message from today's (OT lesson and) gospel: food and drink—not just material food and drink but sustenance in its widest sense. Support.

A fourth century church father said that when we say that Jesus has compassion on people it means that all the individual suffering of many people is gathered in Christ, and Christ bears all the suffering at the same time. That is what we mean when in the Mass we talk about Jesus taking on himself the sin of the world. The suffering of the people is Christ's passion. Christ is the sum total of all the poor in this world.

The feeding of the five thousand is not just a demonstration of Christ's miraculous power, but symbolizes the way in which following the way of Christ can lead us to fullness, wholeness, restoration, salvation, healing. Healing: being made whole, not medical cure. Getting rid of all the stuff we don't need to carry. Jesus' burden is light because we dump all the rubbish – I've said it before and I'll say it again. The manifestation of the kingdom of God here on earth. The disciples tried to shoo folk away, but Jesus told them to feed the people there and then.

This is our job too. We feed the hungry here and now by

- fighting injustice
- comforting the disturbed (and disturbing the comfortable)
- serving the homeless, destitute, and marginalized.

There's plenty to do, and we can't all do it all, but we can all do something. St John Chrysostom said that 'God said to human beings, I have created heaven and earth, now I give you the power to make earth heaven.' That is what happens when we feed the hungry, actually or metaphorically by helping someone who asks for help. That is what we pray day in, day out, when we say 'thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'

Today's readings and the Lord's prayer are spurring us to action.