

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (7/25-26/2009)

2 King 4/42-44, Psalm 145, Ephesians 4/1-6, John 6/1-15

Our rational, scientific and historical minds go into high gear immediately.

Jesus feeds 5000 hungry people with five loaves and two fishes, and with twelve wicker baskets of bread left over!

How could that be?

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes is one of those events that you will find in all four of the Gospels.

In fact, *Matthew* and *Mark* each recount two such extraordinary feedings!

Obviously the feeding of the huge crowd had great meaning for the early Church.

It connected Jesus with the amazing works of the prophets, especially Elisha, in the Second Book of Kings, our first reading at this Mass.

Jesus is thus seen as a prophet sent by God to shake things up and announce new beginnings.

In addition, it demonstrated once more how sensitive Jesus was to the very human needs of the people to whom he preached and taught about the Kingdom .

He slaked their thirst and satisfied their hunger, both material and spiritual.

And, some commentators believe, his action was a foreshadowing of the Eucharist, and, even further, a foreshadowing of the heavenly banquet to take place in the future.

That's significant gravity, past, present and future, heaped on this one Gospel passage.

While acknowledging the importance of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, still our question seeks out an answer: How did Jesus accomplish this marvelous deed?

The simple truth is that we really don't know, though solutions have been suggested in the past.

One has it that the boy who provided the bread and fishes served as such an unselfish example to the other people in the crowd that they all took out their own provisions and began to share them with people around them, as the boy had done.

It's possible, and it would indeed be a "miracle" of generosity had it occurred, but the text makes no mention of such a happening.

Nevertheless, our scientific minds might find this explanation helpful.

A second proposed answer calls the event a miracle, a demonstration of the power of Jesus.

If you don't believe in miracles, this answer will fall on deaf ears.

If you believe in miracles, there you have it.

What actually happened? We really don't know.

We do know for sure that those who believed in Jesus, many of whom would have been present as eyewitnesses that day, never forgot the event and memorialized it in their sacred writings on at least four occasions.

What we can say is that the Scriptures see the presence of God on that auspicious occasion.

There are miracles, and there are miracles. If this one challenges your ability to believe, so be it.

Faith often is belief without "tangible" evidence.

In the end, consider the Eucharist: From our insignificant gifts of bread and wine, the presence of Jesus Christ, Son of God, emerges to feed the world. Now, that is miracle indeed!