



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Do as I have done."**
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Nehemiah 9:16-20
Epistle Romans 8:35-39
Gospel Matthew 14:13-21

Today's reading from Matthew is one of the six episodes in the gospels in which Jesus feeds a crowd. It is of special significance to a parish that is becoming increasingly specialized in Chinese breakfasts and Pot Luck Lunches! It is also an aspect of Jesus' teaching that appears to be one thing on the surface, but that has yet another meaning hidden inside.

Feeding people seems to be an obvious good deed to be done by Christians. Many churches in areas where there are urban poor or massive unemployment have opened soup kitchens or other food programs and that is a commendable thing. Certainly Christians will be amongst those called upon to help in the current catastrophic famine in Niger. And that brings us to the deeper meaning of Jesus' actions.

For centuries, these stories of bread and fish have been connected not only to food programs for the hungry, but also to the Eucharist- the Holy Communion. True, we don't usually serve *galunggong* or *bangus* as part of our service on Sundays, but when we remember that the fish was often used as a symbol both of Baptism and of Christ himself, then its role in this story becomes a bit clearer. We can see the gospel

writers making the connection between the crowds following Jesus and needing physical sustenance, and the millions of people who would be following Him through the centuries in the Church: those who would be fed with the spiritual nourishment of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

These episodes of a mystical “pot luck” lunch based on apparently limited resources also have a connection with the story of Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper when Jesus tells his friends to “do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.” A bit of bread and sip of wine have gone a long way ever since.

But there is another link with Maundy Thursday that is important here- another thing that Jesus does that has implications for all Christians in the Church. Jesus washes the disciples’ feet. It is a disturbing act, and one that still makes people uncomfortable. (When we reenact this every year during Holy Week, it is still only a small number of people who come forward to have their feet washed; I’m never quite sure why. If they think it’s demeaning, they should understand that it’s supposed to be...for the clergy: the washers, not the “washees”.) But the act itself is only symbolic. It stands for all kinds of assistance to be performed by us to others. Jesus is not making provision only for hygiene, but for service. In John’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples on that special evening after washing their feet: “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Hidden in the story of the feeding of the crowd is a similar message. The disciples present Jesus with the challenge of a lot of hungry people and expect him either to do something totally special to satisfy them or to send the people away. Our Lord’s first response is often forgotten in this story: he tells them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” And when a miracle does take place and somebody’s packed lunch reaches ‘group catering’ proportions, the disciples do “give them something to eat.” True, Jesus multiplies the bread and the fish, but somebody offered that menu to be used and it is the disciples who distribute it to the crowds. Jesus stands there and proudly watches His students take their first steps in shared ministry.

This image of Christ involving his disciples in meeting the needs of the congregation can certainly be used in the traditional way to illustrate the role of the ordained clergy in sharing the Holy Eucharist with the faithful, but why stop there? Why not see it also as the reminder to all of us to be ready to share Christ with those who need Him; sharing Him in what we do and how we talk, in how we live up to our Christian faith as the reason for the way we act and the decisions we make. We share Him in feeding the hungry, in caring for the sick, and in providing the spiritual nourishment that the Good News of Jesus life, death and resurrection can bring. It's not just my job, even as rector of this parish: Jesus speaks to his disciples, and that's all of us. In the ways of the miraculous, God is full of surprises, and seldom answers our prayers without us, the pray-ers, being part of the solution. It was true for the disciples back then; it is true for the disciples here at Holy Trinity Church today. "You should do as I have done to you," says Jesus, reminding us that sometimes we ourselves are part of the greatest miracle of all!