

One of the keys to understanding today's Gospel reading is to put it into context by considering the first 12 verses of this chapter which tell the story of the death of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist had criticized Herod for taking his brother Philip's wife as his own. Her name was Herodias. John had told Herod openly that that it was against God's law for him to have her.

His stand against Herod's immorality eventually led to John's execution at the direction of Herod.

Though there is little in the Gospels about Jesus and John the Baptist spending time together, since they were cousins and practically the same age, they most likely played together as children and knew each other throughout their lives.

Jesus paid John the highest compliment that he could pay him by saying, "There is no one who has ever been born of a woman who greater than John the Baptist."

Likewise, John knew that he had come to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry and when he saw Jesus coming one day, he said to those around him, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" which was no doubt a Spirit-inspired prophetic utterance that John could not have fully understood when he said it.

Another time, when John's followers began to leave him and follow Jesus, John said about Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease". It's no wonder our Lord praised John for his greatness.

The verse preceding our Gospel reading for today says, "John's disciples took his body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus."

Our Gospel reading begins with these words, “Now when Jesus heard this (meaning the news of John’s death), he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.” Can you imagine how the news of John’s death must have hit Jesus? It’s no wonder, he tried to withdraw from the crowd and get away by himself, presumably to grieve.

But, it wasn’t to be, was it? For the crowds simply walked around the edge of the Sea of Galilee and were there to meet Jesus when He came ashore. Imagine Jesus’ disappointment. He needed some time for Himself. He is fully God, but He is also fully human with the same emotions of grief and loss that any of us have. He must have been tempted to turn around and get back on the boat and travel some place where the crowd could not follow Him.

But He didn’t, did He? No, He looked out at the crowd and had compassion on them and began to get back to work healing the sick. I remember someone once wrote a book about Jesus and entitled it, “A Man for Others”, and that is what He demonstrated as He walked this earth.

Yes, it is important to take care of ourselves. And no, we can’t keep going 7 days each week forever. But sometimes, the people’s need for ministry is simply greater than the minister’s need for rest and solace. Sometimes, we are called to delay our rest periods, and like Jesus, be “a person for others.” After all, He said that He came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom for many.” And Beloved, He has invited us to follow Him in this life of service and self-sacrifice.

In next week’s Gospel, we will see that Jesus did finally get some time to Himself. But, this week, we see Him laying his needs aside, for the

time being, for the sake of others who are in great need. And sometimes, that will be our plight as well.

It was getting late in the day, and the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people away so that they could go into the surrounding villages and find themselves something to eat.

Probably, just to mess with His disciples a bit, Jesus said to them, “They need not go away. Y’all give them something to eat.”

If any of you have ever been in direct sales, you will remember that you are supposed to make your pitch, that is, tell the person why they need your product, and then you are supposed to ask for the sale. And they tell you in training, after you ask for the sale, you are supposed to shut up and know that the next person to speak loses.

The reason that they tell you this as a salesperson is that you have said all that you need to say. You have made your pitch and asked for the sale, and now you must be patient and wait for a response. You must give the person time to consider what you have said, and you must, by your patient silence, force the potential buyer to make some kind of response, because, again, the next person who speaks loses.

Can’t you imagine Jesus messing with His disciples in this way? I can. I can imagine Jesus saying to them, “They need not go away. Y’all give them something to eat,” and then falling silent to await their response.

How did they respond? Did you notice what they said in response? They said, “Uh, Jesus, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”

And Jesus said, “Bring them here to me.”

Now, right here, Beloved, right smack dab here, may be the key to what we need to learn from today's Gospel. For it is right here that Jesus' poor ole disciples are faced with a choice. They can take their five loaves and two fish and start trying to cut them up and feed five thousand people with it OR (and this is the critical OR), OR, they can bring what they have to Jesus.

Where we are concerned, we have the same choice in our lives, don't we? Whatever problems or situations that we are facing in our lives, we can try and handle it with our limited understanding and with our limited resources, OR, and here is that critical OR again, OR we can bring whatever problem, whatever situation we are facing to Jesus, to God and have God's ultimate resources and wisdom at our disposal. Which course of action do YOU think makes the most sense?

Well, we see what happened to the disciples. They put their five loaves and two fish in the basket and took it over to Jesus.

After asking the multitudes to sit down on the grass, Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

By looking up to heaven, Jesus is demonstrating that He is turning this five loaves and two fish problem over to the God who spoke the world into existence. We see God ACT in response to Jesus turning the problem over to God.

The text doesn't tell us exactly how, but suddenly there was enough, because they exchanged the scarcity of their own meager resources for the abundance of God's resources.

Make no mistake about it. There is some humility involved here. Jesus, in His humanity is humbling Himself and saying in effect to the Father, “Dad, I’ve got a God-sized problem here and I need some help.” And help begins to come, not before, but AFTER our Lord takes the problem to His Heavenly Father.

I wonder, are we ever too proud to take our problems to God for help with them? Does this sound familiar, “I got myself into this. Now, I have to get myself out.” Where did you get that idea? It didn’t come from God. God says things like, “Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and in due season, God will exalt you or lift you up.”

But what about that verse in the Bible that says “God helps them who help themselves.” Ben Franklin or someone may have said that, but it’s not in the Bible, is it? No what IS in the Bible is Jesus saying to his hearers and to us, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

So, Beloved, where the problems of life are concerned, our Lord’s counsel is not, “You got yourself into this. Now, get yourself out of it”, nor is it “God helps those who help themselves.”

No, whether it’s 5,000 hungry people to be fed with five loaves and two fish or a scary diagnosis of cancer or heart disease. Whether it is a family member in a dangerous situation or a friend suffering from an addiction...

Whatever it is, Beloved, the answer, according to today’s Gospel is to bring the problem to Jesus, to depend on God’s abundant resources and God’s compassion to help us sort it out, whatever IT happens to be.