

The love of Christ has gathered us together in one.

Last week the series of parables in which Jesus was describing the “kingdom of heaven” concluded. We heard how he used a series of similes with which to compare its nature. This week the gospel tells the story of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This miracle teaches, among many other things, how the essential effect of the kingdom’s nature, i.e. its very fabric and structure, comes into our lives. It relates how the kingdom, in its coming amongst us, is going to challenge us to be different people, as we are called to change our perspective about ourselves, our relationships and our attitudes to living.

Perhaps the first thing to grasp is that the kingdom is made up of the everyday realities of our lives. There are no secret ingredients known only to a few select people. What makes up the kingdom are the very people we rub shoulders with on a daily basis, alongside their hopes and longings for themselves and their children and their families. This is made clear when Jesus tells the disciples to *give them something to eat yourselves*. In other words we have the raw materials and the necessary resources ourselves, it’s all here amongst us and around us, and instead of making excuses – *this is a lonely place so send them away* – we are challenged to respond by using what we have, and what is available, even when we may feel it is inadequate.

How then are we to make best use of what we have? How are we to respond to the call to make our community a living expression of the kingdom? This is both a practical as well as a spiritual responsibility. We must make space and room in our lives for the sacred, and this means allowing our hearts to become more open and our minds more attuned to the needs of each other. *Make the people sit down*. In saying this, Jesus is asking us to be aware of what is happening. He is asking us to take a moment and to examine our lives. Such a request may sound strange in this context. We are all of us busy, busy people. Our lives have never been more busy, yet there is a moment in our busy weekly schedules when such a moment of calm is offered, and it is in this moment when we can come together to sit down as family and as community, and reflect with each other on our needs and those of our world and ask that we be given *our daily bread*. Here in this moment, a piece of broken bread is mingled with the cup of the suffering world and through it, we are at one, united with all who are lost and lonely, with all who are sick and infirm, and with all who are desperate and without hope. And through this bread all are offered mercy and healing. It seems impossible to imagine, but look at the effects. What seems so small and insignificant is gathered up to make an ocean of goodwill and benevolence. *They collected the scraps remaining; twelve baskets full* and this is the practical application of the resource that the kingdom has become. The active living out of the love of Christ by people, makes the kingdom real, and nothing can overcome it, but it takes courage and hope to live out this love.

A hundred years ago this weekend, Europe was on the brink of disaster and was plunged into a conflagration lasting four years, the effects of which are still felt. We should pray for all those who gave their lives and who made the ultimate sacrifice to keep our freedoms secure. Today wars and the effects of war continue to scar our world, and we must do all we can to avoid such tragedies from tearing communities apart. The cup of sorrow is still being drunk by too many people. The challenge of the broken bread, to live out the kingdom, remains a real one.