



'Light for the Path' a Resource for Families in the Year of Mercy

Session Five: 'You give them something to eat' - the gaze of Mercy

With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of God (the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit). The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of God's love in all its fullness. "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16) John affirms for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given totally freely.... The signs he works ... teach us mercy... Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.

Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realised that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them. On the basis of this compassionate love he healed the sick who were presented to him, and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd. What moved Jesus in all of these situations was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need. (From the Pope's document on the Year of Mercy, MV 8)

- You might like to read slowly through the above extract of Pope Francis' document on mercy. What catches your attention? Do you hear anything 'new' to you?

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Decide on the best time, before or after school, evening or weekend.

Welcome everyone. It's good to be here! How has life been recently?

Background

The Gospel of St Luke is very human and warm, and tells us a lot about the way Jesus **looks out** on the people around, with such mercy – such tenderness and love. Pope Francis often speaks of this **‘loving gaze’**, and that as followers of Jesus, **we are also called to look out** on the people around us – our families, friends, work-mates, and strangers – with that **same ‘loving gaze’**, and to respond to all in need, whatever their ‘hunger’ is. We can’t believe and follow Jesus and engage with our religious practices (e.g. prayers, going to Mass, special devotions), and then turn our backs on people who are suffering. ‘You give them something to eat’, don’t abandon them he says. That is part and parcel of following Jesus - to be like him in action too. So when we in our turn respond to people’s hunger, physical, emotional, or spiritual, we make Jesus present in our world. And Jesus in this story of feeding 5,000 people is showing us there is always more than enough to go round!

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

Let’s stop and think about our lives, and what might be our own experience of **seeing** people who are ‘hungry’, in any way, and how we respond.

- How/when do you look at your family? What do you think about them? And how do you look at people you don’t know – especially if they obviously need something?
- In the family, how do you make sure there is enough food and love to go round?
- As a family, or group of families, in what ways do you ‘nourish’ each other?
- As a family or group of families, how do you notice and respond to the wider needs of people who are hungry, homeless, lacking love, on the margins in your community and wider?

In our Catholic Tradition

Bottom line, in a world where millions of people are literally hungry, and many dying of starvation, we have a duty to follow the way set before us by Jesus: to look out with compassion, notice, and respond to the needs of others to the best of our ability. We mustn’t get so caught up in our own ‘bubble’ worlds that we become selfishly indifferent to the needs of others. In our Catholic Christian tradition, there has always been a strong link between celebrating what we have in our lives, and the mystery of what we share in the Mass, which sends us out with the command to LIVE who we say we are, “Body of Christ”, his eyes and hearts, his hands and feet in the world, to feed those who are hungry. ‘You are what you eat’ said St Leo the Great! Think about it!

In Pope Francis’ response to the Synods, ‘The Joy of Love’ on Love in the Family, he says

'Christian families should never forget that 'faith does not remove us from the world but draws us more deeply into it ... each of us in fact has a special role in preparing for the coming of God's kingdom in our world. Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead, to go out from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others. In this way they become a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between public and private spheres. 'No family can be fruitful if it sees itself as overly different or 'set apart'.... the power of love ... is called to bind the wounds of the outcast ... and help each person to see their fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. (See The Joy of Love, #181-183)

Step Three: We listen – the Word of God (see picture on final page)

At this step you might like to use the '*lectio divina*' guide in this resource. Invite someone to read the Gospel passage slowly, pausing after each verse or couple of verses. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention. Either use a bible, marking the pages in advance (Gospel of Luke 9:11-17) or read from the text box below.

Gospel of Luke, Chapter 9:11-17

Jesus had taken his apostles away to a place where they could be alone together.

But the people learned where Jesus went and followed him. Jesus welcomed them and talked with them about God's kingdom. He healed those who needed to be healed. Late in the afternoon, the twelve apostles came to Jesus and said, "No-one lives in this place. Send the people away. They need to find food and places to sleep in the towns and countryside around here". But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat". They said, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish. Do you want us to go and buy food for all these people?" (There were about 5,000 men there). Jesus said to his followers, "Tell the people to sit in groups of about 50 people." So the followers did this, and all the people sat down. Then Jesus took the five loaves of bread and two fish. He looked up to heaven and thanked God for the food. Then Jesus divided the food and gave it to the followers to give to the people. All the people ate and were satisfied. And there was a lot of food left. Twelve baskets were filled with the pieces of food that were not eaten.

Scripture quoted from International Children's Bible, New Century Version (Anglicised Edition) copyright 1991 by Authentic Media. Used by permission. (This version was translated solely for children from the original Hebrew and Greek texts).

Step Four: We Respond

- What caught your attention in this story?
- Who would you like to be in this story? Why? Who would you *not* like to be?

- What might it be like to be the one who says ‘Send the people away’ to find food and shelter for themselves? Or someone in the crowd, sharing in the food? Or someone asked to collect the leftover scraps?

Step Five: We Mix it Together

Jesus looks out with that loving gaze on the people around *you*, family, and wider and says:

- ‘You give them something to eat yourselves’. How do you respond?
- What’s it like to be fed and satisfied? Is there always enough to go round?
- I wonder, what the story tells us about what is expected of us as family people or ‘Church family’ people - seeing everyone as ‘brothers and sisters’?
 - What might be the ‘hunger’ that’s in your own family, for love and attention, for listening, for sharing good news or difficult stuff?
 - And what about the ‘hunger’ of people on the edge of your family? And in your parish community? What about the physical poverty and hunger of people who are homeless, or living on or under the bread line, or struggling as refugees and asylum seekers? How do we feed these people?
 - When you give, is it all ‘gone’ or do you find something is ‘left over’?

We are invited

- **At home:** Think about what gets in the way of noticing and responding to the needs of people in our families, or amongst our neighbours, in our communities? What stays with you from the conversation? What needs to change?

Step Six: What Might We Do Differently Or New This Week?

- I wonder what you could you do to respond to any kind of ‘hunger’ this week/month? In the family? In the community? More widely?
- Are there some small steps that you and your family could join in with, or initiate yourselves, to respond to the enormous needs of people who are living in poverty?

Step Seven: We Pray

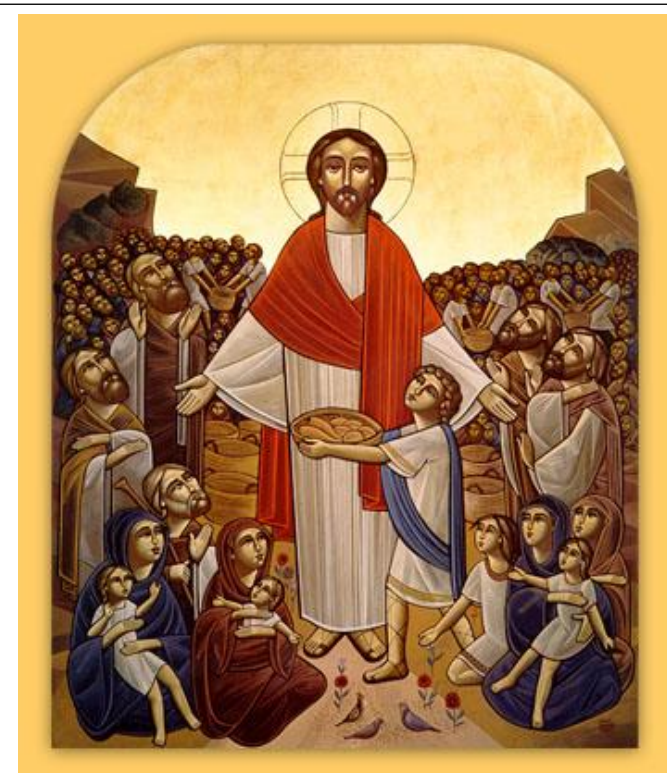
Leader: Let’s sit quietly for a moment, thinking about all we have shared, and remembering the story of Jesus feeding 5000+ people with so little resources, and yet there was more than enough to go round! (*Pause for thinking back*). As we think about these things, we pray:

Thank you for being with us as we gather here in your name Lord Jesus. Through our time together, you have deepened our awareness of how to follow you, and you ask us to look out, gazing on the world with your eyes, noticing the hunger there, and responding with generous, unselfish hearts. May our families and homes be places where anyone can come and be fed in many ways, and so experience something of God's enormous love and mercy for them. We make this prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

God of Surprises! Here is another place where the word 'mercy' appears in the prayers of the Mass. From the Entrance antiphon, for 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 3rd 2016). If you take it very slowly, praying quietly word, by word, pausing and then repeating the words, the Holy Spirit brings it right into your heart – a word from God for you.

'Your merciful love, O God, we have received in the midst of your temple.'

Psalm 47 v 10



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/67/Christ_feeding_the_multitude.jpg

Here is an icon - of the story of Jesus feeding of 5000 people

What might it be like to be in this picture? Where would you be? Imagine yourself in the story. What is your experience? What about the other characters, visible, or not, how do they respond to you?

- I wonder, when you have a 'hunger' inside, how do you see the world? How do you see Jesus? How do you see the people of the community? How do they see you?

How can we be more aware, and be actively supportive of people who are 'hungry', in our families, and in the parish and wider community? What about people who are literally homeless, living in poverty, or starving? How can we respond?