

April 27 Reflection
Fr. Michael Renninger

Some people would call it a “coincidence.” Others would call it a “God-incidence.” It all depends on how you decide to look at it.

It happened on the last day my mom was alive. July 12th. My dad woke up early that morning and he sat at the kitchen table doing the crossword puzzle and the cryptogram.

My dad was always good at these puzzles, and he quickly figured out that the cryptogram for that morning was a famous quote from Dr. Seuss. And it said:

“Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.”

Later that night, around 8:45, my mom passed away. And soon after that my dad handed me the newspaper from that morning. I had tears in my eyes – my mother had died. Why was dad handing me a newspaper?

Dad pointed to the quote from Dr. Seuss - “Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.” And I knew that this message was for me, and for all of us that night.

Some people would call that a ‘coincidence.’ Others might call it a ‘God-incidence.’ It depends on how you choose to look at things.

In the daily mass readings this week, we hear about a crucial event in John’s Gospel. And what happens in this Chapter can change our lives – it all depends on how we look at it!

In John 6, a large crowd followed Jesus across the sea of Galilee. Up to this point in John’s Gospel, Jesus has worked amazing miracles of healing. His words, and his actions, caused people to pay attention.

Now, Jesus is surrounded by at least 5000 hungry people. Jesus and his disciples LOOK at the same crowd, but they SEE very different things.

The disciples look at these thousands of hungry people, and they choose to see thousands of hungry people!

Even if they had sufficient money, there was no Walmart nearby where they could buy food for these freeloaders! The disciples look at the hungry people, and they see – a problem without a

solution.

And Jesus? He looks at all those hungry folks, and he sees... people that he loves. He looks at his panicking disciples, and he sees ... people that he loves.

The world has never known a greater lover than Jesus. He has a boundless capacity to love, so whenever he looked at someone, he decided to see.... a person that he loved.

So toward the beginning of this Gospel narrative, there appears to be a practical stand off. The disciples have decided that this hungry crowd is an insolvable problem, and Jesus sees hungry people whom he loves.

Then, the Apostle Andrew comes forward and says, “Hey Jesus, I know we need to make about 5000 sandwiches. Well, there’s a kid here with 5 loaves of bread and a couple of fish... but what good is that?”

Andrew looks at the young man and his five loaves, and he chooses to see how small the resources are compared to the size of the need.

But Jesus looks at the young man and he sees... someone he loves. Jesus sees a young man who is willing to give what little he has, even though it seems puny compared to the problem.

When God’s love touches my smallest gift or my weakest attempt, something powerful occurs. Christ does not ask us to focus on how big the problem is – Christ is focused on the love with which I offer the gift.

Christ looked at the young man and his tiny amount of food, and he saw... a young man that he loved.

He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and... everyone was fed! And there were 12 baskets left over!

If you take time to read the New Testament, you discover that this event, this miraculous meal with Jesus, is found in all four Gospels. It is a powerful memory in the early Christian Community.

Now, some modern biblical interpreters are embarrassed by anything that looks like a miracle in the Bible, so they try to find another way to explain each miracle story.

So for instance, in this case, they say that Jesus never really did anything miraculous with the bread. Rather, Jesus highlighted the willingness of the little boy to share what he had, and that

inspired everyone else in the crowd to share whatever they had, and that's how everyone got a bite to eat that day.

And yes, sharing is a good thing, a godly thing. And right now in our country, there are lots of stories about neighbors who are sharing during this pandemic. Right here at Saint Mary's, parishioners have been remarkably generous, sharing their resources so that those in need may be assisted.

But I wonder how wise it is to try to 'explain away' every miracle in the Bible. After all, the center of our faith is the greatest miracle of all – the Resurrection! Death gives way to life!

We Christians do believe that the miraculous is real.

So when I read this story of Jesus feeding the 5000, I believe that we are hearing a real memory of the earliest Christian community.

And this real miracle teaches me real lessons in the 21st century. What does this miracle teach me?

+ It teaches me that God's generosity is always greater than my need.

+ It teaches me that God's faithfulness is always greater than my doubt.

+ God's strength is always greater than my weakness.

+ God's wisdom is always greater than my questions.

+ God's forgiveness is always greater than my sin.

+ God's life is always greater than death.

+ God's love for me is always greater than my ability to understand.

No matter who we are, when Christ looks at us, he chooses to see... *someone he loves*.

Whether I am young or old, whether I am white or black, whether I am strong in faith or struggling, whether I am Republican or Democrat...

Whatever my lifestyle, my educational background or my country of origin... when Christ looks

at me, he chooses to see... *someone he loves*.

And because he loves us, he gives us more than we could possibly need.

The little boy in John's Gospel has very little to offer Jesus. There were 5000 hungry people – he had five small loaves of bread. If he had focused solely on how small his gift was, he would never have offered it.

But we are not supposed to focus on how small we are – we are to focus on how big our God is.

Mother Teresa felt called to take care of the poor in India. The need was overwhelming. All she had to offer was her one, solitary life. How could she make a difference?

Well, look what God did with that one, solitary life! Today, tens of thousands of Sisters serve the poor, because they are following Mother Teresa's example.

Right here at Saint Mary's, I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of our parishioners during this pandemic. On a recent Sunday morning, a family came into the church to pray for a little while.

As they left, their young son approached the table where I was sitting, and he rather shyly handed me an envelope.

It was a \$25 gift card to Kroger. He told me to give it to a hungry family. His mom told me that he had helped neighbors with yard work in the previous week, because he had heard that there were hungry people who could not feed their families during this pandemic. So he did yard work for the neighbors, took that money, and donated a grocery gift card.

Some might say, "well that is a \$25 card in the face of 25% unemployment. What good is that?"

What good is that? Yes, it might appear to be a tiny gift in the face of a huge need.

But I look at that gift card, and I see... a miracle. It all depends on how to look at it.