

Today's Gospel tells us of two miracles performed by Jesus – the feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus walking on water to come to the aid of the disciples. If taken literally both stories may have little or no meaning for us. However, if taken symbolically, we may see them in a different light and have a different understanding.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is told in the style of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The actions of the eucharist are seen as Jesus taking the bread, breaking it, and giving it to the disciples to distribute to the people. In his book "Passion for the Possible" Fr Daniel O'Leary writes: "The Liturgy features two tables – the table of the Word to nourish our minds, and the table of the Bread to nourish our hearts."

With the light of Christ in our minds and the love of Christ in our hearts, we are sent from the altar to love and serve the Lord. The celebration in church would be empty if the love and compassion of Christ was not carried out into the streets. We are charged with the responsibility of sharing and distributing God's love and compassion with others. As Christ commanded "Give them something to eat yourselves."

The story of Jesus "walking on water" to reach the disciples in a boat during a storm has for many years become a point of scorn and laughter. However, if we can look at it symbolically, the winds and waves stand for the ridicule and persecution of Jesus and His followers. Jesus is not with them physically in the boat – He has already ascended to His Father – but in their time of need, He makes His presence felt among the disciples and in so doing calmed their fear and brought them peace.

There are those who think that if they have enough faith life will be plain sailing. Faith does not shield us from the hard knocks and problems of life. What is true, is that in our time of need and despair, if we have enough faith to reach out to God in prayer, God will be a presence to us, to comfort and encourage us to face our difficulties. Most of us will know that on our own we find it difficult to withstand the storms, fears, and sinking experiences of life. But as Christians, we have learned through faith, to reach out to God in prayer – and we know that the Word of God will give us courage and that the presence of God will give us peace.

Families are under stress as the values and codes which traditionally guided life are questioned or disregarded. Parents are fearful about how their children will turn out. Pressures are put on young people by their peers with regard to drugs, sexual prowess, and the materialistic standards they are expected to reach. These factors combine together in a depressing burden which many are finding too heavy to bear, yet through the darkness comes the voice of God – "It is I, do not be afraid". A writer, Olive Wynon, in her book "Consider Him", quotes from the letters of St Francis de Sales who noticed a farm servant drawing water from a well. Before lifting the pail of water the girl put a piece of wood into it. He asked her, "Why do you do that?" to which she answered, "To keep the water from

spilling – to keep it steady”. St Francis thought about this, and then wrote, “When your heart is distressed and agitated, put the Cross into its centre to keep it steady”.

In every time of storm and stress, the presence of Jesus and the love which flows from the Cross, brings peace, serenity and calm.

Reference: John 6:1-21  
S.O'Flynn  
Flor McCarthy  
W.Barclay