

Many of you are probably at least passingly familiar with Mother Angelica. She was the spunky religious sister who founded and grew the first Catholic television network, EWTN, which now broadcasts all over the world. When praying with that familiar account of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, I couldn't help but think of Mother Angelica. Her simple, but profound faith was similar to that of the boy we hear about in the Gospel, who brought his loaves and fishes and placed them at Jesus' disposal.

In the early days of EWTN, Mother Angelica became aware that they would need a good size studio to produce content for their television station, so she did something unexpected. She instructed the maintenance guy at the convent to wrap some white rags around trees on the property. With the rags, he marked off a section of about 50 by 100 feet. As she tells the story, there were some bishops visiting and one of them asked about the rags. Mother replied, "Well, we need a studio real bad, we don't have the money, so it's a reminder to the Lord; that's where we need the studio." The bishop replied to her, "Don't you think He knows?" She said, "Oh yeah, but it don't hurt to remind Him." "Does it work?" He said. "Yeah." She replied. So another week passed by and an older gentleman came to visit the convent and asked about the rags. She told him her story and he said, "Interesting." The following day, he returned, explaining that his wife had passed and that he was getting close to the end himself and that he would like to give her \$50,000 to start the studio.

And that is how it started: just some white rags put around trees at her convent. That act of trust inspired the older gentleman's initial donation and Mother started building right away, even though she knew she would need more to complete it. And sure enough, every step along the way, the Lord brought people into the project who could help it along. Because Mother Angelica focused on the mission at hand, that of bringing the Gospel to people through television, the Lord miraculously provided for the worldly necessities to make it happen. She put her trust in Jesus and wasn't disappointed.

This is what is at the heart of this dramatic miracle that we hear about in the Gospel today. You may have heard this Gospel described as a miracle of sharing, but I don't think there is much to support that interpretation. Basically, it is a way of explaining away the miracle happening with the loaves and fishes. The explanation is that all of the Jews who were there used to hide food in their clothes for the day, and when they heard Jesus giving thanks, they were inspired to get the food out of their clothes and share it.

The problem with this interpretation is that Jesus himself was a Jew and so were his Apostles. If the Jewish people really did carry around extra food with them all the time, wouldn't they have been aware of this and not concerned with how everybody would be fed? And at the end of the account in John's Gospel, St. John specifically mentions that the twelve wicker baskets of fragments were from the five loaves, not from the food that everyone had brought with them. Additionally, there is no evidence historically from the Bible or any other ancient source that this was a Jewish practice. So let's not look at it as a miracle of sharing.

We can truly see here that Jesus is performing a miracle of multiplication. This is something that He is able to do because He is God made man. If He is the Word through Whom God the Father spoke all of creation into being from nothing, I think He can miraculously multiply bread by His willing it. But the point of this miracle was for Jesus to teach them to look beyond the most immediate miracle to something even deeper: the mission at hand. The things of this world are meant to be at the service of the Kingdom and not the other way around. This is why Jesus does this dramatic miracle and then withdraws to the mountain alone. He knows that people are tempted to look at Him as simply a worldly king who could keep their bellies filled.

The point wasn't to fill their bellies, the point was to allow them to listen to his teaching. Have you ever tried to pay attention to someone with a growling stomach? It's tough to do! So he fed their bodies as a means to feeding their souls. Jesus saw this large crowd and sat down on the mountainside to bring them the spiritual nourishment their souls

desperately desired. His main goal was to bring them out of darkness and into the light, to prepare them to be part of His new kingdom which would start here on earth but find its fullness in Heaven. He was after them as whole people: people destined for something much more than just the passing satisfaction of a full stomach. He wanted them to have life to the full now and endless life with the Trinity and all the Angels and Saints in Heaven. But to teach them, He knew that they needed to be fed. His miracle of multiplication worked on several levels: it more than met their bodily needs while at the same time pointing them to the fact that He was more than just a teacher, but God himself, able to satisfy the deepest longings of their hearts. He was showing them by the sign of the leftovers filling the twelve wicker baskets that he could fill their souls to overflowing with His superabundant grace.

So what is the takeaway for us this Sunday? It is to remember that the earthly blessings of God are not the end, they are the means. When that boy brought his loaves and fishes to Jesus, I have to imagine it was because Jesus' grace was already at work in His heart. He was giving what He could because He wanted to be a part of Jesus' mission. He wanted to help Jesus reach more people and that simple offering was his way to help. And look what Jesus did with it! The same was true for Mother Angelica. She had a heart to serve the Lord and reach people through the medium of television, so she put those white rags around the trees and trusted the Lord to provide. And He did! He provided much more than just material things. Through that studio, countless people all over the world have come to know Jesus and His Church more deeply.

What is it that we can bring and put at the Lord's feet? God calls each of us, in our own practical ways, to bring what we can to help serve the mission. You might think that what you're bringing is small or insignificant, but in the Lord's hands it can be multiplied! God desires to reach many people here in Coshocton, and we are all a part of His plan. Each of us has earthly blessings of time, talent and treasure that we can offer in support of His work. When we focus on Jesus' work and how we can support it, our

offerings, however small or big, will be multiplied to accomplish great things for His Kingdom.

Jesus has so much to do through this parish. All of us in this church need Jesus' grace to heal our hearts where they are wounded. There are people who haven't darkened the doors of a church for a long time in our community that Jesus wants to reach and heal with His grace. Jesus wants to reach Catholics in Coshocton who have lapsed in the practice of their faith. He wants to draw in those around here who are not part of any church. With His abundant love, He wants to bring our Christian brothers and sisters into full communion with the Catholic Church. Jesus' Sacred Heart burns with love for the souls of Coshocton, for you and me. He wants to involve each of us in His mission of reaching and saving souls. Let's pray that He would give us generous hearts to put our gifts at the service of the growth of His Kingdom here at Sacred Heart.

+ Father, thank you for the grace of Jesus, which multiplies the gifts that we bring to Him. Jesus, thank You for providing us with gifts that we can put at the service of Your mission. Holy Spirit, inspire us with the generosity to give what we can from our time, talent and treasure so that more and more might encounter the life changing grace of Jesus through our parish. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. +