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Dear Friend of the Missions!

I hope that summer is shaping up to be a time of rest. There are some feasts in July worth remembering and using as days of prayer for special intentions. July 1<sup>st</sup> is the feast of Blessed Junipero Serra, a great day to pray for the missions. July 3<sup>rd</sup> is the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, a great day to pray for those who have doubts in faith. July 15<sup>th</sup> is the feast of St. Bonaventure, a good day to pray for the Franciscan family. On July 22, the Church remembers St. Mary Magdalene, one of the Lord's women disciples. July 26<sup>th</sup> is the feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary and the grandparents of Jesus. Please pray for all grandparents, living and deceased. There are also civil holidays that are important to observe: July 1<sup>st</sup> is Canada Day and July 4<sup>th</sup> is Independence Day. Pray for the people of Canada and the United States, that God may bless them and give them peace, prosperity and a spirit of generosity. Always be assured of our prayers for you, your loved ones and your intentions. There would be no missions, if it were not for all of you and people like you who believe in helping to share the gift of the Gospel. May God keep you in his love.

### Summer of John 6

Fr. Russell Becker, O.F.M.

As it works out, Mark's gospel is too short to provide readings for all the Sundays of the Year, so the Church takes the opportunity to reflect on John's version of the miracle of the loaves and the fishes and its explanation. On the last Sunday of July the Lectionary in the Year of Mark begins proclaiming John 6. As Jesus feeds the multitude, he then proceeds to explain the meaning of this 'sign'. It is one of the many signs that St. John uses to help people to understand who Jesus is and offer a moment for conversion. John's Gospel takes a different approach than the Synoptic Gospels.

There are lots of ways to look at the chapter, just as any other part of the Bible. One is to learn a little about the customs of the times which can offer some interesting reflections. Another is to study the words used and their context and apply methods of criticism which look at content, author, style, Tradition, history, Church doctrine, commentaries and studies from the early Church, saints, and scholars among others.

**Many a miracle.** In looking at the text, the idea of Jesus taking some loaves and fish and feeding a large crowd testifies to our belief in the divinity of the Lord: he fed at least five thousand people, they had their fill and there was a lot left over. As the story is proclaimed in the Liturgy, it is a credal statement. We all say "amen" and we acknowledge our God to be mighty and compassionate.

There are words used that immediately help us to see this as a Eucharistic image: *Then Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them....* Can any of us miss this implications as we hear the words of the Last Supper? So we celebrate the Eucharist to give thanks to the mighty and compassionate God who continues to feed us with his Body and Blood.

Another point of reflection could be the words that Jesus speaks to Philip: *where can we buy enough food for them to eat?* There is a certain irony here? Who has that much food? But Jesus seems to want the apostle to feel some responsibility for feeding the crowd. It is most likely that everyone had a little food and water with them. This was the way people moved around. There were no places to grab a bite along the way. It is possible that some had forgotten because they were following Jesus and did not think to bring along their usual supply. Now, though, it was time for people to eat. Some would think that the crowds would have been observing Jesus very carefully and that Jesus and his disciples began to share their food. This gave more and more of the crowd the courage to share with those around them. A miracle of some degree given the fact that there were so many people, they were hungry, hot and tired. They did not give into the temptation to selfishness, they shared.

In the end, the text says: *When they had had their fill, Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them and filled twelve wicker baskets...* What a miracle: our God really knows how to care for us in abundance! This was one of the signs that the Messiah was at hand. But, what another miracle: when we share what we have brought for ourselves we always discover that there is more than enough! This is one of the signs that we love as God loves.

**Miracle for today.** In speaking to our time, especially in the industrial world, we need to offer interpretations that will challenge our time. The presentation of the mighty God who can multiply loaves and fishes may not be as impressive to a technology that can also multiply loaves and fishes. We are impressive people with mighty power who can do things that are truly miraculous. [Remember in the Book of Exodus 9Chapter 7), Moses tried to impress Pharaoh by turning his staff into a snake, the Egyptian wise men and magicians were able to do that too and Egypt was not impressed—people are not impressed by

things they themselves can do!] Perhaps the sharing miracle is a greater challenge to our age, since we tend to hoard our multiplications and often do not share them. While our technology shows us to be mighty and able to multiply, it does not show us to be all that compassionate and able to share. To speak of the sharing and the amount left over after sharing could be the true challenge to our impersonal technological might. Thus we are not only praising the mighty God, but also following the compassionate God.

**Miracles demand a response.** Miracles are not spectator sports. You are not supposed to be amazed by miracles and just delight in the power of God. Every miracle is a challenge for us to conversion. If we are miraculously fed, we are to commit ourselves to feed others. This chapter of John will continue and Jesus will speak of the implications of the miracle. There was not much positive response. Some wanted to proclaim Jesus King, others thought he was absurd saying that he is the Bread of Life. Most rejected the implications of the miracle. In the end, we will all be challenged to come to the Lord, to be his disciple and become other Christs to carry on his mission. At the end of this chapter (John 6), Jesus is left with just a few of his disciples and he asked them: *Do you also want to leave?* The disciples courageously respond: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* Guess who is being asked that question today? Who will have the courage to respond?

**Sensus plenior.** Some get all excited at this discussion and say it is watering down Scripture. It is not a problem for us to understand readily that the miracle of the multiplication and feeding prefigures the Eucharist and the whole chapter gives the Church the opportunity to reflect on the Eucharist, its implications for our lives, to deepen our understanding of who Jesus is and seek our conversion.. But to limit the interpretation to just this is exactly watering down the Scripture. The early Church continued to pray, reflect on and study the Sacred Texts. They were always seeking the “fuller sense.” You need only to read early Church commentaries on the Song of Songs to understand how they read the Bible. This, like all the texts of the Bible, has depth and layers of meanings that the Church has not exhausted even in these past 2000 years. It is amazing that some people are threatened by plumbing those depths and picking away at these layers. Why should we be frightened to allow God to surprise us and challenge us and instruct us. God has been doing that since the very first day God spoke and said: *Let there be light!*

Read and pray the texts to prepare for Sunday Mass. Listen to them proclaimed in the Sunday assembly and allow yourself to be surprised by God. Share some of those surprises with others. It will be quite a summer of John 6.

## Reflection Questions

1. Do you read the Sunday readings to prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Day?

2. Are we grateful for a God who feeds us with abundance?

3. Are we willing to share that abundance?

4. What is being asked of you as you reflect on the miracle?

5. Is your discipleship unshaken even in the face of difficult times?

Please remember the following missionary friars on their birthdays:

Fr. Thomas Kornacki, O.F.M. (Bolivia): July 12  
Fr. Bede Fitzpatrick, O.F.M. (Japan): July 13  
Fr. Anthony Wilson, O.F.M. (Peru): July 14  
Fr. Carlos Sarmiento-Diaz, O.F.M. (Peru): July 25  
Fr. William Keenan, O.F.M. (Bolivia): July 27  
Fr. Christopher Dunn, O.F.M. (Peru): July 29

May God bless them with health, strength and happiness!

Remember our present and retired missionaries who are ill:

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Ignatius McGeady, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Southern US)  
Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)  
Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)

May God’s healing love care for them and give them peace.