

**Final Exegesis Paper on  
“Feeding the Five Thousand”  
Matthew 14:13-21**

Professor Dr. Linda Schearing  
Gonzaga University, RELI 501 Studies in the OT & NT  
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## **MATTHEW 14:13-21 [NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION]**

### **FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND:**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” <sup>17</sup> They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” <sup>18</sup> And he said, “Bring them here to me.” <sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full, <sup>21</sup> those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The story of Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand with five loaves and two fish is the only miracle narrated in all four of the Gospels (Matt 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-4, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-16) attributed to its unusual importance and popularity of Jesus' miracles. I elected the pericope from the Gospel of Matthew because of Matthew's strong works-orientation though highlighting the message of grace. This exegetical study analyzes the literary and historical aspects of the passages under discussion, as well as the theological interpretation and what it means for Christians today in a “pseudo-homily”.

### **2. LITERARY ANALYSIS:**

#### **2.1. TEXTUAL LIMITS AND CONTEXT**

##### **2.1.1. MICRO CONTEXT:**

One should place the passages under discussion (chapter 14) in a larger scope from chapter 13 to 17 in order to realize its significance:

I. Chapter 13 tells the audience the kingdom of God, main theme of Matthew's Gospel, is approaching, and anyone who is invited into God's kingdom has to decide for themselves the course of action. From this point on, the mystery of Jesus is revealing; Jesus' followers will be recognizing Him as the Son of God (14:33 and 16:16). Through Jesus and His disciples, the reign of God is more perceptible to the audience. One can name the scope of chapter 13-17 as "The Faith Journey of the Church" because these five chapters suggest the gradual institution of the Church. The characteristic of faith in both the pericope and the micro context is where they are connected.

II. The block of chapter 13-17 begins with the rejection of Jesus by the Nazarenes in his own country (13:53-58) and ended with the intimacy of Jesus and Peter that only found in Matthew as Jesus pays taxes for Peter, the first pope of His church (17:24-27). Fear of Herod in the death of John the Baptist (14:13) and the hostility with the Pharisees (15:11-12, 16:1-4) are "the motives for Jesus' withdrawal"<sup>1</sup> from the city to a desolate place (14:13, 15:21); this motif is found both in the pericope as well as the micro context.

III. This block is constructed around Faith: The author recounts the lack of faith, Peter's doubt in the story of walking on the Water (14:31) and the story of the disciple forgetting bread in 16:8. In the story of the Moonstruck Boy (The Demoniac), Jesus charges "you unbelieving and perverted generation..." (17:17); according to scholars, Matthew is the only author recounts the disciples could not heal the boy because their lack of faith; the great faith of the Canaanite woman (15:28) is also found only in Matthew's Gospel. Faith is the characteristic trait of Matthean disciples as in 14:17, the disciples replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish;" even though their resources are inadequate to feed the crowd but they still offer to Jesus in faith. Jesus responded in 14.18 by issuing a discipleship call and making them to walk by faith.

These accounts exhibit Matthew's concern about faith especially the faith of the disciples. Audience can view that this is a journey to profoundly discern faith and strengthen it in an effort to train the leaders for the Church; one can find this motif in both the pericope as well as the scope of the micro context.

### **2.1.2.MACRO CONTEXT:**

Matthew's Gospel was written intended for the "better educated Jews who believe in Jesus, but argue over the Law"<sup>2</sup> and therefore, the theme of fulfillment is revolving throughout his texts. Jesus fulfilled the promises and the law of the Old Testament through his life by his words and deeds. In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples are called upon to go beyond the behavior of those who merely keep the letter of the Law, but not its spirit (Mt. 5:20). Jesus vigorously criticizes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, but Matthew is writing for the early church and his primary concern is that such hypocrisy not be found among its leaders; in the feeding of the Five Thousand, Jesus intended to train His disciples to show initiative and to be Church leaders. Most noticeably, the central theme of Matthew's Gospel is the "Kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup>

The pericope suggests a small unit of the Church; the micro context, chapters 13 – 17 is the gradual establishment of the Church and the ultimate church is the "Kingdom of God" in the macro context. "As the feedings anticipate the Eucharist, the Eucharist anticipates the messianic banquet in the kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

### **2.2. LITERARY FORM AND STRUCTURE**

The category of biblical literature found in the pericope is the Gospel genre that contains narrative sub-genre of a nature miracle story. The passages under discussion can be architected in three sessions:

#### **A. Story setting - Jesus heals the sick (14:13-14):**

- a. **First tension (vv. 13-14a):** The first tension arises between Jesus and the crowd, between Jesus wanting privacy and the press of the crowd. Jesus sought privacy in order to pray. As the story reveals, Jesus did not get the opportunity He wanted until later that evening

(v. 23). In the face of the horrific news of John the Baptist beheaded, Jesus was sustained by his relationship to His Father in prayer. He sought privacy to pray, but the gathering crowds would not give Him time and space; they anticipated his destination, walked on foot, and awaited his arrival.<sup>5</sup>

- b. **First tension resolved:** Compassionate Jesus saw the great crowds and cured the sick (v.14). One needs to look no further than this story to understand the meaning of compassion. “Compassion” is the ability to be moved by the needs of others in mercy than to move towards Himself. Jesus resolved the tension with compassion by healing the sick.<sup>6</sup>

#### **B. Scene setting - Jesus feeds the assembly (14: 15-21):**

- a. **Second and third tension (vv. 15-18):** In this scene, the second tension occurs between the disciples and Jesus over who is responsible for supper. The disciples give the primary responsibility to Jesus, telling him to send them away. The secondary responsibility is given to the people to buy food themselves. The disciples see their situation in the deserted place at the late hour and conclude that Jesus and the crowd have responsibility for supper. Jesus turns the table on them: “They need not go away; you give them something to eat” (v. 16). The tension mounts between the expectation of the disciples and the anticipation of Jesus. The disciples’ vision is small but the vision of Jesus is boundless.
- b. **Second and third tension resolved (vv. 19-20a):** The disciples took inventory of their resources. “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish” (v. 17). Jesus responded by issuing a call to discipleship: “Bring them here to me” (v. 18). If compassion resolves the first tension in the story, discipleship resolves the second.<sup>7</sup>

The third tension is the tension between supply and demand. The five loaves and two fish were an inadequate supply for the yet unnumbered crowds Jesus commanded to sit on the grass. The story is crafted to create suspense after suspense as we listen for the tensions to be resolved. Despite the variations among the six miraculous feeding stories in

the Gospels, all come together here; the inadequacy of resources, multiplied abundantly to feed the assembly. The tension between the small supply and the great demand is resolved in the hands of Jesus, who made the loaves abundantly.<sup>8</sup>

**C. Conclusion - fourth and unresolved tension, recording the multiply of bread and fish (vv. 20b-21):**

The first three tensions mentioned above have been resolved; however, the fourth one does not get resolute. It has to do with the abundance as the story begins with insufficiency and ends with twelve baskets of leftovers that nobody knows what happens to it.<sup>9</sup>

**3. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS:**

**3.1. AUTHORSHIP:**

Traditionally, the author of the story of Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21) which was embedded in Matthew's Gospel is attributed to Matthew, the tax collector called to follow Jesus and named among his twelve apostles (Mk. 3:18; Mt. 9:9; 10:3; Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13)<sup>10</sup>. It is however according to biblical scholars, Matthew's authorship of the Gospel to which his name has been affixed is doubtful.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless Papias, a second-century Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, in his earliest testimony to Matthew's authorship proposes that the apostle might have composed the life and teaching of Jesus in a collection at the beginning of the Gospel tradition.<sup>12</sup> Scholars today, however, argue that the original author was "anonymous," and the name of Matthew was only later assigned to this book. What best known at this juncture about the implied author is "a multi-lingual (Aramaic & Greek) early Jewish Christian, trained 'scribe' of 13:52"<sup>13</sup>

**3.2. SOURCES:**

As for its origin, the Feeding of Five Thousand is recounted in all four Gospels, but it seems only two of these can be considered independent sources because from the foundation, Matthew and Luke are believed to have used Mark as a source. Based on the extreme similarity between Matthew and

Luke's version to that of Mark's, in addition to the time period in which each Gospel was believed to have been written as well as the similarity of other stories throughout the Bible that are coherent to the pericope, it is probable that Matthew and Luke used Mark as their source. Among the coherent stories are the Feeding of Four Thousand (8:1-9; Mk. 15:32-39), Bread of life (Jn. 6:25-59) and the Lord's Supper (26:26; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14).

Most scholars today however accept the Four-Source Theory<sup>14</sup> also known as the Two-Document Hypothesis<sup>15</sup> of synoptic Gospel origins. According to this theory, Mark is the earliest written Gospel which Matthew and Luke utilize as their narrative framework; this is because the errors found in Mark's Gospel such as grammatical, literary, historical, and geographical difficulties are corrected in Matthew and Luke. Episodes that are hard to understand in Mark's Gospel (4:26-29; 14:51-52) or make Jesus look crazy (3:19-21), magical (7:32-37), or weak (8:22-26) are also omitted in Matthew and Luke<sup>16</sup>.

Q, a lost but theoretical written "source" (Quelle) of some sayings or teachings of Jesus found in only Matthew and Luke, not in Mark; M, a variety of additional materials (primarily oral, some possibly written) revealed only in Matthew; L, an assortment of other material (mainly oral, others likely written) found only in Luke<sup>17</sup>.

Base on these suppositions, the full text of Matthew's Gospel draws material from three of the four sources: Mark, Q, and M.

### **3.3. DATE:**

A consensus among biblical scholars about the date of Matthew's composition is approximately in late 70 or 80 C.E.<sup>18</sup>. As discussed earlier, Matthew's direct dependence on Mark's Gospel, and its explicit reference to Jerusalem's destruction (22:7) as well as the presupposition of Mark's text that was written either during or soon after the Jewish War of 66-70 C.E. suggest a date of composition after 70 C.E.<sup>19</sup> Scholars also argue that Matthew's text was compiled approximately in 85 C.E. "by a second-generation Christian in an urban Greco-Roman setting."<sup>20</sup>

### **3.4. GEOGRAPHY:**

Geographically, Matthew Gospel was originated in Antioch in Syria according to scholars. Peter's prominence harmonizes well with his undoubted status there (Gal 2:11), and the mixture of Jew and Gentile in a large urban area is consistent with composition in Antioch. Further, Ignatius may be the earliest witness to Matthew, and he was bishop of Antioch; these and additional considerations however do not add up to proof.<sup>21</sup> Thus numerous sites have been considered, including Jerusalem, Galilee, Alexandria Caesarea Maritima, Phoenicia, or more generally, east of the Jordan (on the basis of 4:25 and 19:1, which may view Palestine as being on the other side of the Jordan). Biblical scholars today are in consensus that the book of Matthew was perhaps composed in "Galilee; probably in or near Antioch in Syria"<sup>22</sup> as it is supported by the following arguments: (1) the untrustworthy patristic evidence for Palestinian origin; (2) the indication by the author's anonymity of a major church's influence; (3) Peter's significance in Matthew's message; (4) Antioch's very large Jewish population and the Gospel's Jewish orientation; and (5) Ignatius of Antioch's citation of Matthew's text.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.5. TARGET AUDIENCE:**

As for its targeted audience, the Matthean author and his community were most likely Christian Jews with ancestral traditions. Many of the Matthean passages, including the feeding of the multitude exhibit a strong Jewish perspective and therefore "Matthew's Gospel was written by and for Christians in transition."<sup>24</sup>

In summary, the implied author of Matthew's Gospel is a multi-lingual (Aramaic & Greek) early Jewish Christian, trained "scribe" of 13:52<sup>25</sup>, using Mark and Q as its primary sources plus the individual source M. Matthew's Gospel probably was written approximately in late 70 or 80 C.E. and perhaps in Galilee, near Antioch in Syria<sup>26</sup> for "Christians in transition."<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. VERSE BY VERSE ANALYSIS, PARALLEL TEXTS AND WORD STUDY:

As introduced earlier, the story of Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand is the only miracle narrated in all four Gospels (Mark 6:32-4, Matt 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-16). Despite the variations among these miraculous feeding stories in the Gospels, its parallelism is extended to six accounts including the Feeding of Four Thousand in Mt. 15:32-39 and Mk. 8:1-10. This episode also echoes the spiritual feeding in 26:26-29, and early Christian meals in Acts 27:35, 1 Cor 11:23-24 as well as the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:8, 2 Kings 4:42-44, Deut 8:10).<sup>28</sup>

**Verse 13, “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns”:** The verb “withdraw” occurs three times in eleven verses of Matthew’s chapter 2. Each time the “withdrawal” was a response to a dangerous situation. In 2:12 the Magi were warned not to return to Herod, and they “withdrew” to their country by another road. Similarly, Joseph was warned about Herod’s intentions, and he “withdrew” to Egypt (2:14). Another time, when Joseph was in Egypt preparing to return to Israel, he was warned that Archelaus, Herod’s son, was in power. Because of the danger, Joseph “withdrew” to Galilee (2:22). This motif continues in 4:12. Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been arrested, and he “withdrew” again to Galilee. In 12:14 a Sabbath controversy moved the Pharisees to conspire against Jesus “to destroy him.” When Jesus heard it, he “withdrew.”

Here in verse 13, the same motif occurs over again following John the Baptist’s gruesome execution by Herod.<sup>29</sup> Jesus is in grief at the horrific news of His cousin’s death; He withdraw to a deserted place by boat (Mark 6:32) near the town of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). It probably was not too far from Capernaum, but probably by taking the boat, they are hoping to discourage the crowds from following them. The exact location of Bethsaida that they headed for is not clear. Matthew apparently wants the reader to understand that Jesus withdraws to the other side of the lake, where Herod Antipas has no authority. The sovereign representative of the kingdom of God, when faced with the hostile power of the kingdom of this world, does not respond with violence, but demonstrates the nature of his kingship by withdrawing.<sup>30</sup>

Bethsaida (house of the fisherman) is a small fishing village situated probably at the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee near where the Jordan River flows into it. It was the home of Phillip (John 12:21), Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44). Jesus fed the five thousand in the area (Mark 6:45; Luke 9:10-17), healed a blind man (Mark 8:22 - 26), but cursed the town for not accepting him (Matt. 11:21-22; Luke 10:13-14).<sup>31</sup>

A direct translation of “deserted place” is the “wilderness” that echoes where Moses asked the Lord to provide bread (the manna and the quails) from heaven for the congregation of the sons of Israel (Ex 16, Num. 11). Much resemblance can be found in Jesus and Moses; like Moses, Jesus sailed across the water to the wilderness. Like Moses, Jesus addresses the physical hunger. Evidently, Matthew aims to portray Jesus as parallel to Moses, yet exceeding him as the source of a new age.

**Verse 14, “When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick”:** Jesus is weary and in grief of the death of his cousin John, but he doesn't turn the crowds away; so often when we are under pressure or anxiety, we turn away people who invade our time and space, but Jesus instead had compassion for the crowds and cured the sick (14:14). Luke's Jesus makes the crowds feel welcome by receiving them favorably, teaching them about the kingdom of God, and healing those who needed to be healed (Luke 9:11). Matthew recounts a few times Jesus has shown his compassion by healing the sick (14:14, 9:36 and 15:52). Mark's Jesus “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6:34)

**Verse 15, “When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves’”:** “Evening” echoes the account of the last supper when Jesus instituted the sacrament of Eucharist also in the same manner started “in the evening” (26:20).

**Verse 16, “Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’”:** In each of the Synoptic Gospels, the disciples come at the end of a long day, and they ask Jesus to dismiss the crowds of “about five thousand men besides women and children” (14:21) so that they can get

something to eat before they journey back homes. Jesus' response is startling! "You give them something to eat." (14:16) Jesus' answer clearly impractical to the disciples but this is a lesson for them to show initiative and to be leaders.<sup>32</sup> John's Gospel reveals that Jesus has anticipated what he is going to do: "He asked this only to test Philip" (John 6:6). Jesus probably wants the disciples to realize the absolute inadequacy of their own resources. Although it is inadequate, it undoubtedly reminded early Christians that they had been called to be God's instruments in meeting the needs of others. In Matthew's Greek the command is definite: "*You*, you give [the food] to them to eat!" (v. 16); the prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" requires active participation from those who wish to see it answered.<sup>33</sup>

**Verse 17, "They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.'":**

Matthew's Jesus no longer met by the disciple's sarcastic response of Mark 6:37; they instead volunteer their scarce resources. Like Moses (Ex. 16), Jesus did not need the inadequacy of "five loaves and two fish" (14:17) but the message here is God will multiply our tiny resources abundantly if we offer to Him in faith and love, just as the poor widow putting into the treasury "two small copper coins" in the story of the Widow Mite (Mk. 12:41-42). In the same token, the story also reminds early and modern audience that God uses what we bring, even if all we have are five small loaves and two dried fish, Jesus uses what his disciples bring to him. Many poor Christians have been encouraged by this story to offer their little for the work of God's kingdom, knowing that no offering is too small for God to use.<sup>34</sup>

**Verse 18, "And he said, 'Bring them here to me.'":** Jesus responded by making a call to discipleship, making His disciple to walk by faith, and multiplying their faith, tiny like a mustard seed to grow vigorously and that has been proven through their martyrdom later on.

**Verse 19, "Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds":**

“Sit down on the grass” suggests that it is spring time implying the feast of Passover is coming up. John’s Gospel explicitly indicated that “the Passover was near” (John 6:4). Passover is reminiscent the last supper with the disciples of Jesus before His death and resurrection.

There are clear references to Holy Eucharist in this verse. The liturgical references are described as “*Taking* the five loaves ... and *blessed* and *broke* the loaves, and *gave* them to the disciples.” This sequence of actions using these four key verbs are described in “various New Testament accounts of Jesus feeding the multitudes (in all four Gospels), the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, and the Early Christian Church's commemoration of the Lord's Supper (also called the "Breaking of the Bread" or later the "Eucharist")”<sup>35</sup>; see Mark 6:41, Luke 9:16, John 6:11. The Feeding of the four thousand in 15:36 and Mark 8:6 also exhibit the same actions. The Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels and mentioned by Paul narrated the same sequence of actions (26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:17, 19-20, 1 Cor 11:23-26); the Supper at Emmaus in Luke 24:30-31, 33, 35 and the Early Christian "Breaking of Bread" in 1 Cor 10:16-17, 1 Cor 11:17-21, Acts 2:42, 46, Acts 20:7, 11 and John 6:35, 47-58 demonstrate the same actions as well.<sup>36</sup>

**Verse 20, “And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full”:** twelve probably symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel under the twelve apostles<sup>37</sup>.

One can also argue that the motif of twelve baskets of leftovers warns against waste. It is natural to think of this detail as pointing to the superabundance of God’s supply, but in fact a mere twelve basketfuls after many thousands have eaten suggests a very narrow margin. The story suggests that God will provide with a little to spare, but there must be no greed or waste, or some will go hungry.<sup>38</sup>

**Verse 21, “those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children”:** Matthew’s addition of women and children is significant because the total figure could very well exceed twenty thousands. Since the total Jewish population of Palestine at the time is estimated at half of a million, Jesus is presented as feeding a tenth of the population. One must perceive this is a social miracle

that echoes Exod 16 and Num 11 (the manna and the quails), as well as 2 Kgs 4:1-7,42-44 (Elisha multiplying the oil and bread).<sup>39</sup>

Matthew perhaps wants to use this figure to compare Jesus and Elisha that Jesus is surpassing Elisha in 2 King 4:42-44 where he multiplies “twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack to feed a hundred men and have some left over.” Jesus multiplies five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand which is at a ratio of one to a thousand while Elisha is one to five. This demonstrates that Jesus is more than a prophet who can make miracle happened; He is the mighty God!

In summary, all four Gospels almost recount the same story but John’s had two extra details. First, John 6:1-14 mentioned Jesus testing Philip and the second variation is where Andrew, Peter’s brother, introduced the boy who has five loaves and two fish” (John 6:9). In the three Synoptic Gospels, the disciples report to Jesus that they have “five loaves and two fish” (14:17) and disregard where it came from. Despite these two differences, the central story is almost identical throughout all four Gospels; Jesus multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish to feed the crowds of five thousand people; though Matthew wants to expand the numbers of people present by adding “besides women and children” (14:21) and thus the greatness of the miracle; the pericope should perhaps be renamed as “The Feeding of Twenty Thousand”<sup>40</sup> in Matthew’s version.

#### **4.1. TRANSLATION COMPARISON**

A translation comparison of the major translations including New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Revised English Bible (REB), New American Bible (NAB), New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) and New International Version (NIV) reveals nothing significant to discuss except for some slight variations in word usage such as “secluded’ versus “deserted”, “cities” versus “towns” and the like.

#### **5. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION**

The discussions to follow outline what scholars said about the pericope from two eras in the history of interpretation: the patristic period of the Early Church Fathers, St. John Chrysostom and the modern

period of feminist criticism characterized in a book by Celia M. Deutsch. The last section is my personal reading of the passages.

### **5.1. EARLY CHURCH FATHER:**

St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, born at Antioch, c. 347; died at Commana in Pontus, September 14, 407, is considered the most prominent doctor of the Greek Church and the greatest preacher ever heard in a Christian stage.<sup>41</sup>

St. Chrysostom's comments on the pericope as follows: In verse 13, because Jesus knows the devil's craft, and therefore he would leave nothing undone to destroy His doctrine. He then for this end withdraws; but the crowd does not give up following Jesus, and not even John's tragically end alarmed them at all. "So great a thing is earnest desire, so great a thing is love; in such wise does it overcome and drive out dangers."<sup>42</sup> As a result, they immediately received their reward as Jesus was moved with "compassion toward them, and healed their sick" (14:14).<sup>43</sup>

As discussed earlier, Matthew emphasis on good deed, for both by coming to Jesus, and by leaving their cities, and by diligently seeking Him, and by remaining with Him even when hunger was pressing, they demonstrate their faith by their own deed.<sup>44</sup>

Jesus is about to feed the crowd but He does not take the initiative; he however waits to be implored by the disciple. The crowd did not speak for themselves either, because they exceptionally revered Him, and felt not even their hunger, through their longing to stay with Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

In verse 15, for if even after miracles and miracles, they forgot what had been done; Jesus begins by healing the sick, but not even from this, the disciples would expect the miracle of the loaves; so imperfect were they. But Jesus said to them, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat." (14:16) Even so they regard Jesus as a man and still reasoning as with a man, saying, "We have but five loaves, and two fishes." (14:17) Jesus instructs, "Bring them hither to me." For although the place is desert, yet Jesus feeds the world there.<sup>46</sup> Jesus multiplies the food out of the materials which the disciple had, so

that He might lead them to faith; for their faith were rather weak. "He took the loaves," therefore, "and broke them, and gave them by His disciples," (14:20) to honor the disciples, he gave it to them; and not just to honor, but also when the miracle had been gone they might not disbelieve it, nor forget it as their own hands bearing them witness.<sup>47</sup>

The twelve baskets to remain over, that Judas might also bear one. At all events, so greatly were the Jews amazed at Jesus for the miracle, that they wished even to make Him a king (Jn. 6:15). Having taken the fragments, Jesus gave them not to the crowd, but to the disciples, because the multitudes were in a more imperfect state than the disciples.<sup>48</sup>

## **5.2. CELIA M. DEUTSCH**

Professor Celia Deutsch has taught at Barnard College since 1985. She specializes in the fields of early Judaism and early Christianity, and the comparative study of mysticism. Her book title "Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages, Metaphor and Social Context in Matthew Gospel" explores ways in which early Christian teachers used a female metaphor (Lady Wisdom) to think about the role of Jesus and their own status as teachers in their community.<sup>49</sup>

Commenting on the role of women in Matthew's Gospel, Deutsch uses verse 14:21 "those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children" to suggest that women most often appear as minors in the Gospel of Matthew, as is the case in a patriarchal society. Therefore women are placed with the children even in the redactional additions as in Mt. 14:21 and 15:38, where women are distinct from the men as part of the crowds when Jesus feeds the multitude miraculously. She goes on to add: "Women do all the things one would expect in a patriarchal social structure: they give birth (24:8), make bread (13:33), go to weddings (25:1-13). In other situation, they intervene on their children's behalf (15:21-28)."<sup>50</sup> Only in the genealogy does the audience see women who puzzle them (1:1-17) Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary the mother of Jesus. The first four are foreigners, outsiders, and there is something irregular about the way in which all five women are sources of male heirs. Furthermore, in addition to their status as women and as

foreigners, Rahab and Bathsheba are perceptible as being prostitute and adulteress; Mary is liminal by the way in which she conceived her son not by a human father, but “from the Holy Spirit” (1:18, 20).<sup>51</sup>

According to Deutsch, “Marginal” is a word that comes to one’s mind in considering the women in Matthew’s gospel. In other words, women are not seen in roles of public leadership or decision making. One might make the assumption that such was also the case in the Matthean community. This is not to say that women receive negative evaluation. On the contrary, Matthew’s redactional addition in 14:21 and 15:38 when Jesus feeds the multitude suggests that Jesus addresses his message to women and children as well. The presence of the women at the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion, derived from the Markan source (Mk. 15:40-41), stands in a stark and positive contrast to the absence of any reference to Jesus’ male disciples. Jesus praises women along with other marginal persons (tax collectors and harlot). They make their needs known, sometimes with boldness that is itself praised (15:21-28). Tax collectors and harlots repent (21:32). Women frequently are in need of help, for themselves or for someone dependent on them. They ask for it and exhibit faith in doing so. “Women’s status becomes a challenge to Matthew’s audience to learn faith from those who are marginal,”<sup>52</sup> according to Deutsch.

### **5.3. PERSONAL INTERPRETATION**

Various subjects for discussion can be derived from the story of feeding the multitude; I however would like to focus on the Social Justice and in particular the “leftover”. The pericope characterizes social justice, which makes them different from previous healing stories. It is not just a miracle but it is about the people giving and sharing their provisions so that all have enough. In this story and Matthew’s book as a whole, God cares about the welfare of all people not just those who belong to any particular religious community or group as the feeding of the multitude excludes no Gentiles neither women or children. The story begins with insufficiency and ends with even more bread left over than there had been when they began; this portrays an eschatological vision of the reign

of God (main theme of Matthew's book) that is considered astounding the audience as they are left amazed at the abundance and wondering what happened to the twelve baskets of "leftovers".

I prefer to think of the feeding the multitude story as one commentator suggested: people in the crowds want Jesus to exchange the loaves of bread among themselves; that way the loaves continually multiply abundantly; so that the loaves themselves experience transformation and become an endless supply of bread. Others, however, suggest that what really transformed were the selfish hearts of the crowd, as when they saw the charitable act of the boy offering Jesus his five loaves of bread and two fish (Jn. 6:9), they were inspired, search their lunch packs and share the food "leftover" from their lunch. The real transformation then, was not of the loaves and the fish, but of selfish hearts of the crowd. Unfortunately, some perhaps prefer to focus on the transformation of the loaves in order to avoid the conversion of their hearts. Others want to focus on the supernatural of the story in order to steer away from the transforming miracle needed in every human heart.

This is perhaps why Mohandas Gandhi, leader of the Indian nationalist movement campaigned for East Indian independence, is right when he said: "Anyone of us can be a thief because we have too much "leftover" while there are many poor people around us who are even lack of the basic needs such as food and cloth. If we have something "leftover", it is what we have stolen from the poor who are in need of that." It is important for us to contemplate and concern about the act of charities as it is the heart of Christian.

The fourth and unresolved tension discussed in session 2.2 ends with twelve baskets of "leftovers" that nobody knows what happen to them; this unsolved conflict will never be resolute unless the self-centered hearts are transformed, so that the hunger for food, for cloth, for fresh water and air, for home, for medicare, for love and for peace would come to an end.

#### **5.4. HOMILY (PRACTICAL APPLICATION)**

Tom and Peggy is a devoted Catholic couple in St. Vincent de Paul parish, who attend Mass regularly at the Downtown Chapel; on one weekday Mass, they were praying during the general

intercessions that God may come to help the poor and the homeless this cold winter. At the end of the Mass, a fifth grader ran into them and said to the couple: “Why bother God about the homeless! You and I can do it ourselves.” The boy in a way reminds us that thoughts and words without deeds are only half of the equation as St. James of the Apostle utterly proclaims in his epistle: “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” (James 2:17) and as God answers to St. Paul’s prayer in 2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness...” and so to our prayer: “My grace is sufficient for you, so you can do it yourselves.”

In today's Gospel, the disciples are praying Jesus to feed the hungry crowd by sending them home, so that they could buy food for themselves. Jesus responded by issuing a call to discipleship: “you give them something to eat” (14:16) knowing that they have nothing but “five loaves and two fish” (14:17) to feed the crowd of “five thousand men besides women and children” (14:21). The debate regarding whose responsibility for the needs of the world is addressed here by Jesus. Discipleship is not merely a matter of conserving the limited resources but it is a matter of sharing and giving what we have in faith, hopes, loves. It is the acts of faith to which Jesus calls his disciples to go beyond human logic and realism.

The story of the feeding speaks to many of us today as we can readily identify with the disciples to find that our compassion is very much limited to prayers and wishes as St. James of the Apostle put it: “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:15-16). Like the disciples we wish people well but we find a way out to “short cut” our responsibility. Like the disciple, what prevents us from involvement with actual deed is often the rationale that our unrealistic resource won't make any appreciable difference.

God created the world without aid from any of us, but since then, God has chosen to use people like Abraham, Moses, Mary, the disciples and even you and me as His instruments on earth for the sake of human's salvation. Likewise, in today's Gospel, Jesus does not let the disciples be merely

spectators of His compassion; they were participants from the analysis of the situation to the distribution of the bread, Jesus involved his disciples in the whole process from initial concept to final release of the food, “gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds” (14:19). John’s Gospel recounted the tiny resource brought by the little boy was abundantly multiplied; so as our small deed if we offer to God in faith and love; the little we are able to do is multiplied by God’s grace in such a way that it becomes more than sufficient for other’s need as quoted by Mother Teresa of Calcutta: “There are no great things, only small things with great love.” At the heart of the story in today’s Gospel is the implied invitation for you and me to surrender our tiny gifts, the gift of our little lives to Christ, so that his mighty miracle is materialized through us.

I would like to conclude with the story of how a young man contributes his own “five loaves and two fish” to make a difference in the lives of others:

“A man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a young man going back and forth between the surf’s edge and the beach. Back and forth this young man went. As the man approached he could see that there were hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide.

The man was stuck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. As he approached the young man continued the task of picking up starfish one by one and throwing them into the surf.

As he came up to the young man he said, "You must be crazy. There are thousands of miles of beach covered with starfish. You can't possibly make a difference." The young man looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked one more starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said, "It sure made a difference to that one!"<sup>53</sup>

Today, Jesus continues to involve the disciples to feed us through the Holy Eucharist; Jesus offers to refresh us at the Eucharistic table, with the bread of life given for us; his very blood, shed for us. This is the miraculous feeding of the multitude that draws you and me to a deepening relationship

with God and empathy with those in need. We are to be nourished with His graces as we cannot feed the hungry without sharing in the Eucharist, nor can we share in the Eucharist without feeding the hungry.

Let us prepare ourselves to receive Jesus at the Eucharistic table by praying to Him: Lord, Jesus, receive our tiny gifts, the gift of our little lives that we offer to you unconditionally. Do with us as you will, where you will and when you will. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## NOTES:

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- <sup>1</sup> R. M. Fowler, “*Loaves and Fishes*,” S. Masuda “*The Goodnews of the Miracle of the Bread*,” in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Richard J. Clifford, S.J., Joseph . A. Fitzmeyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.
- <sup>2</sup> Felix Just, S.J., “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*”,  
<[http://catholicresources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholicresources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>3</sup> Jude Siciliano, OP, “*Preaching Matthew*,” < [http://www.judeop.org/preaching\\_matthew.htm](http://www.judeop.org/preaching_matthew.htm) >  
(November 5, 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> Fowler, “*Loaves and Fishes*,” Masuda “*The Goodnews of the Miracle of the Bread*,” in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Eds. Clifford and Murphy, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.
- <sup>5</sup> Roger E. Van Ham, *The Lectionary Commentary, Theological Exegesis For Sunday's Texts*  
(Grand Rapids: William B. Bredmans Publishing Company), 1999, 83.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 84.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Just, “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>11</sup> John Nolland, “*The Gospel of Matthew*,” in the *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 4.
- <sup>12</sup> Benedict T. Viviano, “*The Gospel According to Matthew*,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Brown, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 630.

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- <sup>13</sup> Just, “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> Just, “*The Synoptic Problem*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic\\_Problem.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic_Problem.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London, Macmillan, 1924).
- <sup>16</sup> Just, “*The Synoptic Problem*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic\\_Problem.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Synoptic_Problem.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Just, “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>19</sup> Viviano, “*The Gospel According to Matthew*,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Brown, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 630.
- <sup>20</sup> Mark Allan Powell, “*Matthew*,” in *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, ed. J. L. Mays (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 868.
- <sup>21</sup> Barton and Muddiman, ed., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 844.
- <sup>22</sup> Just, “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>23</sup> David C. Sim, “*The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*,” *Studies of the New Testament and Its World*, eds. John Barclay, Joel Marcus, and John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 53-54.
- <sup>24</sup> Powell, “*Matthew*,” in *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, ed. Mays (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 868.

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- <sup>25</sup> Just, “*The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts*,” < [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four\\_Gospel\\_Chart.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Four_Gospel_Chart.htm) > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Powell, “*Matthew*,” in *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, ed. Mays (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 868.
- <sup>28</sup> Fowler, “*Loaves and Fishes*,” Masuda “*The Goodnews of the Miracle of the Bread*,” in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Clifford, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.
- <sup>29</sup> Van Ham, *The Lectionary Commentary, Theological Exegesis For Sunday’s Texts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 82.
- <sup>30</sup> Neil Alexander, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 323.
- <sup>31</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, ed. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 118.
- <sup>32</sup> Fowler, “*Loaves and Fishes*,” Masuda “*The Goodnews of the Miracle of the Bread*,” in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Clifford, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.
- <sup>33</sup> Douglas R. Hare, *Matthew Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 165.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Just, “*The Feeding of the Multitudes, the Last Supper, the Lord’s Supper, and the Eucharist*,” < <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Eucharist.htm> > (November 5, 2007).
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Fowler, “*Loaves and Fishes*,” Masuda “*The Goodnews of the Miracle of the Bread*,” in the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Clifford, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.

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<sup>38</sup> Hare, *Matthew Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 165.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>41</sup> Kevin Knight, “*Father of the Church/Homily*”, < <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200149.htm> > (November 15, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Barnard College, “*Celia M. Deutsch*”, < <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/deutsch.htm> > (November 15, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Celia M. Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, And The Sages -Metaphor And Social Context In Matthew’s Gospel* Trinity (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 138.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>53</sup> Loren Easley, “*The Starfish Story*” < <http://www.starrbrite.com/starfish.html> > (November 30, 2007).

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