

Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

In [James Joseph Tissot's](#) painting, we get a peek at what it might have looked like the day Jesus organized the crowds into clusters and fed them with multiplied loaves and fish.*

What do I like or dislike about Tissot's rendition? Where do I see Jesus in this painting?

Image source: [Miracle of the Loaves and Fish](#) (enlarged image)

** If all are the same species, the correct plural is fish. "Fishes" refers to the likely presence of multiple species of fish, especially in scientific contexts.*

Opening Prayer

God of Our Hopes and Dreams

Lord God,
we are empty... and long to be filled.
We are hungry... and long to be fed.
We are lost... and long to be found.
Gather us into your love.
And pick up the pieces of our lives...
just as the apostles gathered up the fragments...
of the five loaves and two fish...
that fed over five thousand people.

Call us anew to eat our fill...
and find our true nourishment in Jesus...
the bread of heaven.
Amen.

Source: Adapted from Abingdon Worship Annual 2009. Posted on the [Ministry Matters](#) website.

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 55: 1-3 “All who are thirsty, come to the water!”

Psalms 145: 8-9, 15-18 “Generous to a fault, you lavish your favor on all creatures.”

Romans 8: 35, 37-39 “Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ’s love for us? There is no way!”

Matthew 14: 13-21 “When Jesus got the news [of John the Baptist’s death], he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself.”

Introduction to the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

This weekend’s readings invite us to have faith in God’s desire to feed and nourish us along the zig-zag path of our daily lives. Then, how do we dare think *we* have total control... and only need divine help when the going gets really tough?

In Isaiah 55: 1-3, we hear, “All who are thirsty, come to the water!” The Prophet offers these words to women and men of faith. And what a wonderful, comforting invitation it is. Rejecting Yahweh’s gift can only result in spiritual emptiness.

In Psalm 145: 8-9 and 15-18, we read that “God is all mercy and grace—not quick to anger—and is rich in love.” The history of God’s chosen people might have played out differently had they listened—*really listened*—to the words they sang and prayed! No wars! No exiles fleeing to safer shores! No rejection of their Messiah, when he arrived in “the fullness of time”!

In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans (8: 35, 37-39), we hear, “Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ’s love for us?” What a reassuring promise to the fledgling community in Rome! Several years after writing this letter, Paul joined these same converts in the capital of the empire, where he and many of them suffered martyrdom around 64 AD/CE.

In Matthew 14: 13-21, Jesus said to his apostles, “There is no need to dismiss [the crowds]. You give them supper.” After a stunned silence, they managed to scrape up a few loaves and fishes. That was all Jesus needed. Yet, another example of God’s compassion for *all* humans (worthy or unworthy), in this life and at the hour of death.

Reading from the Book of Isaiah 55: 1-3

[Then Yahweh said,] “Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway—buy and eat! Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk. Buy without money—everything’s free!

“Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy? Listen to me, listen well. Eat only the best, fill yourself with only the finest.

“Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words. I’m making a lasting covenant commitment with you, the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.”

Personal Reflection

The narrator in Isaiah 55 is God (Yahweh), who speaks in the first person (e.g. I/me) throughout the chapter. He delivers an invitation of free grace, calling the spiritually thirsty and poor to come and receive abundant spiritual nourishment and an everlasting covenant.

The original Isaiah wrote the first 35 chapters of the book bearing his name. Another unnamed prophet wrote this second section from which we read today. This later writing became attached to the original Book of Isaiah.

A third writer composed what now comprise the final eleven chapters (56–66). The primary theme of these chapters is the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem, coupled with a call for the returned exiles to maintain covenant faithfulness and social justice.

— *How much of my precious time and money do I spend on “stuff” I can hardly call “life enhancing”? How might I change my spending habits... for the better?*

Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-18

A psalm of praise

The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

God is all mercy and grace—
not quick to anger, is rich in love.

God is good to one and all;
everything he does is soaked through with grace.
The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

All eyes are on you, expectant;
you give them their meals on time.

Generous to a fault,
you lavish your favor on all creatures.
The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Everything God does is right—
the trademark on all his works is love.
God's there, listening for all who pray,
for all who pray and mean it.
The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Personal Reflection

In the entire collection of psalms, Psalm 145 is the last one attributed to King David. It's also the last of the nine psalms using some kind of “acrostic pattern,” meaning a word puzzle or poetic device where the first letter of each line (or paragraph) spells out a hidden word, message, or the alphabet when read from top to bottom. The spelled-out word is called the “acrostich(e)” and is usually related to the overall theme of the psalm. (This biblical pattern only works in the original Hebrew version.)

— *How has my appreciation for these 3,000-year-old song-prayers [psalms] grown through these reflections on our weekend liturgies? In what way specifically?*

From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8: 35, 37-39)

“Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture.

“None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”

Personal Reflection

“Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us?” Jesus' love for us is everlasting and unconditional. In recent years, however, many of our fellow congregants locally and abroad have walked away from regular participation in the Mass, the Eucharist, church services, and other opportunities for spiritual and communal growth. They may have what they consider good reasons, but their absence from our local faith communities causes us sorrow. The crucified and risen Christ does not love them less for their absence. Yet, we miss them.

— *If someone in my immediate family finds no reason to take part in Church/ parish life and worship, how might I become a gentle, Christlike missionary within my own home and/or family circle?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (14: 13-21)

“When Jesus got the news [about the death of John the Baptist], he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself. But unsuccessfully. Someone saw him and the word got around. Soon a lot of people from the nearby villages walked around the lake to where he was. When he saw them coming, he was overcome with pity and healed their sick.

“Toward evening the disciples approached him. ‘We’re out in the country and it’s getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.’

“But Jesus said, ‘There is no need to dismiss them. *You* give them supper.’

“‘All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they said.

“Jesus said, ‘Bring them here.’ Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. About five thousand were fed.”

Personal Reflection

In this passage, we witness a “wiped out” Jesus. Grieving the loss of his cousin, John the Baptist, he needed to get away... for a while, at least... to pray—and recharge his spiritual batteries. No such luck! Rumors of his destination spread among the people, and they followed on foot. By the time they found him it was already late in the day. Most hadn’t eaten and were hungry, without access to any nearby markets.

[Rev. Michael Joncas](#), a Catholic priest, composer, and artist in residence at the [University of St. Thomas](#), St. Paul, MN, had this to say about Jesus’ willingness to feed his followers, “There are six accounts of the multiplication of the loaves in the New Testament, five in the [Synoptic Gospels](#) (Mark 6: 31-44, Mark 8: 1-9, Matthew 14: 13-21, Matthew 15: 29-38, and Luke 9: 10-17) and one in the Gospel of John (6: 1-15). The details of these accounts vary, but most scholars hold that, underlying all the accounts, is at least one historical event where Jesus performed this miracle or a “sign,” as John the Evangelist describes it, involving the transformation of a small amount of food into a feast at which all were satisfied, with some food even left over to take home with them.”

— *When was the last time I had that same feeling of just needing to rest but couldn’t get away from those who demanded my time and energy? How did I handle myself on that occasion?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening and Reading

Watch

You’ll find a reenactment of the [multiplication of loaves and fishes](#) on YouTube (beautifully portrayed).

Listen

“We Need a Miracle: A song about Jesus feeding 5,000” by [White Dove Bible Songs](#)

“Come to the Feast” by [Michael Joncas](#)

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Kings 19: 9, 11-13 “Nourished by (his) meal, Elijah walked forty days and nights, all the way to the mountain of God, to Horeb.”

Psalm 85: 9-14 “Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss!”

Romans 9: 1-5 “You need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow.”

Matthew 14: 22-33 “As soon as the [miraculous] meal was finished, Jesus insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people.”

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A Loaves and Fishes Prayer

(inspired by Matthew 14: 15-21, Mark 6: 35-44, Luke 9: 12-17, John 6: 4-13)

Merciful God,

we praise you for your unfailing love.

We praise you for giving us “the bread of *life*.”

We praise you for taking our little basket of fish...

and barley loaves... and using it to feed others.

Lord,

we ask you for your care and healing touch...

for those who are sick.

We ask for your compassion on those suffering in our world.

We ask comfort for those grieving.

We call upon you to empower us...

as we declare who you are... to a world that needs you.

We call upon you to inspire us... as we seek to inspire others.

We call upon you to strengthen us... in our weakness.

Amen.

Source: [Rev. Abi Todd](#), Episcopal priest, East London, UK

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message Bible* translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)

Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase,
celebrated for its readability.

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