

My brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Today we see that Our Lord's heart was moved with pity for the crowd of people who had been following him and listening to him for more than three days. He recognized their hunger, and feared that they would not have the strength to make it home by themselves unless they had nourishment for their journey. And so, with the collaboration of his apostles, he feeds his people before sending them on their way.

This beautiful story from St. Mark's Gospel has several key features in it that we must pay attention to if we wish to fully understand its meaning for us. First, let us notice that Jesus does merely preach at, or to, the crowd of people. In some way he is actually engaged with them in such a way that he is aware of even their personal needs. This is something very important for us to pay attention to because it reflects on our actions as a Church, now. I think Pope Francis would speak of this as a moment of encounter, where Jesus is open to the fullness of the persons before him. He is aware of the particular circumstances they are in. He takes action, in faith, to meet their most basic needs — namely, to feed their hunger. I think this is important for us as a Church to reflect on as we promote a new evangelization as disciples and missionaries of Jesus. We must evangelize the way Jesus evangelizes — with an awareness of the realities of the people before us!

Our Church has a great treasure in the fullness of the faith. We want to share this great treasure with others. But sometimes our methods fall short because we have focused on the message *we*

want to give, and not on the real persons right in front of us! When the people are hungry it is hard for them to listen to the truths of our dogma. When the people are in pain or fearful it is difficult for them to see the beauty of our faith. And so, as Pope Francis reminds us, and as Jesus demonstrates today, we must pay attention to the real persons before us, and, in addition to preaching the word, we must address their hungers.

So, the first key feature is that Jesus pays attention to the real persons before him. The second is that he is not afraid of, nor distracted by this encounter with the real persons and their needs before him. He folds their needs into his message, and his actions become a part of his message. Here, in feeding the four thousand, he both preaches and demonstrates the providential care of God the Father. His message and his actions are one!

I think this speaks to our calling from the Lord as the Church of San Antonio, today! Our message and our actions need to be one. As we listen to the message of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, we realize that *encounter, encuentro*, is not merely an idea, but is meant to be our way of being a Church of disciples and missionaries right now, in 2018, right here in the Archdiocese of San Antonio! I need your advice and guidance as the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council in order to help fulfill this calling.

Let me clear. *Encuentro, Encounter*, must become our way of being as a church today. We must evangelize as Jesus evangelized! Our message and our actions must grow to be one. This means reimagining how we preach, catechize, worship, and serve as a

community of disciples and missionaries. We will not do it perfectly, though we will try our best. We will make mistakes along the way. But, to refer back to Pope St. John Paul II, we must “be not afraid!” I am sure that the apostles were confused when Jesus told them to take seven loaves of bread and serve 4,000 people! But, in doing what Jesus commanded, the miracle of the multiplication occurred. Let us trust Jesus now, and do as he commands!