

## St Pius-St Anthony 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

When I was a kid, we had a game-prank, that if anyone was ever down on the ground, everyone around had to jump in, or better yet, jump on, we called it 'pile on'! Maybe it was after a tackle when we were playing football in the corner lot, and then someone called fumble. Oh, look out, pile on! Or maybe it was when two of us were wrestling in a death match, and it appeared we were stuck. One of us says, 'Your down-tap out', the other says back, 'No your down-tap out', Well, at that point the crowd settled it with a 'pile on'! Or when we were given the job to rake the yard leaves. We did good at first and then after a mound built up, someone pushed someone into the mound and then 'pile on'! That last particular game always ended badly, because it wasn't long after rolling around in leaves, that someone came up screaming something about 'no, no its dog doo in there'. But the 'pile on' led to it. I know that means you are in deep, pile! But being piled on, we might feel that way when it comes to bad news? Does it feel like sometimes that it just keeps piling on ?

A good question to ask is, "How do you handle bad news?" Do you say, ***'Give me a moment'***? That is Jesus' response today. He hears of the news of John's death, and he withdraws for a bit.' Give me a moment, He says. To do what? He prays, reflects, & refocuses on the continuing work of the kingdom. Jesus is establishing a pattern for us: In several places, scripture specifically points out that Jesus takes some solitary prayer time before big, significant events and decisions, as things seem to mound up. For example, in Luke 6:12, Jesus spends a night in prayer, maybe overwhelmed with the needs in ministry, and then the next day he calls-names his coworkers-twelve apostles. In Luke 9:28, Jesus goes up the Mount to pray, and there reveals His divinity to Peter, James, John: what we call Transfiguration. And this happens just before he makes the fateful decision to set his face toward Jerusalem and journey on there to his death.. Also, remember that he spent 40 days alone in the desert (Luke 4:1-13) preparing for launch his public ministry, coming on the scene full time as Messiah-Teacher. And of course, He spent a big night in prayer (basically alone when we consider his sleepy apostles) in the garden of Gethsemane before His passion and death (Luke 22:41-46). So it should not surprise us that after He 'takes this moment' processing in prayer the news of John's death, that immediately following it, something momentous-big is going to happen. And it does-that great feeding and healing fest. But I emphasize that Jesus sets a pattern for us to follow, that when we are faced with bad news, our first reaction should be 'step back', enter inside, or take a moment with Jesus, and process the news in light of the long view of what God may be accomplishing by the events.

Aren't we doing that right now? Further, I like how Jesus labors on even despite the discouraging news (because it only gets worse-watch how it piles on Him). But we know His shoulders are broad enough to carry the cross of the world. Notice that as he regroups following His grief processing in prayer, He is faced immediately with the sight of something that makes his 'heart be moved with pity'? What moved His heart so? Was it the vast crowd appearing so lost=wandering aimless? Or did the crowd appear so hurt and grieving itself because of the simple 'hardness' of life, or because of the rampant illness and poverty among it? The scripture doesn't say, except that Jesus had 'pity-felt

deep compassion for everyone'. *Here is where it gets good though*: Jesus began to cure the sick. Jesus answered the bad news by serving--turning toward others to help them. Isn't this our Good Shepherd for us? He establishes another great response pattern for us. His friend in ministry, John, family cousin is killed by a murderous tyrant, and then Jesus sizes up the immensity of suffering in the crowds, and He goes right to work. He begins comforting, building hope, healing and doing something about it. How would we respond? Like standing at the foot of a great mountain we have to cross by climbing straight up it. What do we do? If we are going to get anywhere, we have to start, begin walking some steps and do something about it. Mountain doesn't climb itself or open up to let us pass thru, so we have to move our legs, exert and tackle it. When I hear about Jesus seeing the 'vast crowd' (and we are going to hear later that at least 5,000 are fed, so it is a huge mass of people--I might have thought, "Where do you start?" But we know the answer: 'Start right where you are.' I emphasize again, that Jesus did not excuse the poor away as just part of life, he didn't 'rabble-rouse' like an attention seeker, going off on a rant against Herod and the Roman economy that made so many people poor and hurting. No, He simply went to work. He simply walked into the crowd and began his teaching and healing. When I think of how He sized up the immensity of the crowd's needs, I am reminded that our Savior took everything on with hope, doing something- anything rather than defeatedly giving up; He took on disease, poverty and hunger, one heart, one body, one person at a time. It reminds me of a couple of years ago, as that book was written about Mother Teresa and her 'dark nights' of discouragement (We only learned about this when someone released some of her private journals). But some of her journal entries showed her humanness about feeling down when even after great successes in treating the sick and feeding the street poor. She would call it a day, go to sleep; then wake up the next day and there were even more people in the street in need! But despite even that discouraging news, that a saint can have a bad day, the point of hope and light is that Mother Teresa kept going. She took on that next day with its discouragements and kept right on ministering in the name of Jesus, doing what she and her sisters could together (leaving the rest to God.)

And Jesus is doing that today. What will happen? The gospel tells us. We give it all we got, and God will make it be enough. If we give what we have however little or however great, He will add to it. A Miracle, no doubt. He will take five loaves and two fish and He will feed over five thousand. And He will use us to do it. I like the detail where he does the multiplying and then hands the fish and loaves to the apostles for them to hand it to the crowds. We give what we have; we offer what we have in the Name of Jesus, and He will use it to feed and heal and comfort the crowds. What we think is nothing, and of no use, Jesus takes up and uses to feed thousands. But He wants us to be part of it the remedy to bad news. Bring it to me, He says. It might have sounded like even more bad news, to just say 'I only have five loaves and two fish', but it wasn't when it was brought-offered to Jesus. After asking us what we have, He takes it, blesses it and makes it abundant to serve out to feed and heal others.