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The Collect for this morning served in ages past as an exhortation for the lady of the house to go home and begin her Christmas preparations, especially her Christmas pudding. Christmas pudding is a kind of boiled pudding, similar to a fruit cake, but filled with numerous spices, fruits, and nuts which would be quite expensive today. Our lady of the house would mix up all these ingredients, pour in a copious amount of brandy, boil it, and then set it aside to let the mixture mature or marinate until it was boiled again on Christmas Day and served that night. So ingrained did the Christmas pudding become for English society that many folk traditions sprung up around its preparation. It was *stirred up* on this Sunday not just so that the pudding would have a month to marinate, but in hopes that it would bring a blessing to everyone who ate it. It was also customary for every member of the family to take a turn *stirring up* the pudding. The fruits used in the pudding represented the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The brandy poured over the mixture represented the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Serving the Christmas pudding with a sprig of holly symbolized the crown of thorns that Jesus would wear, and setting the brandy alight represented Christ's passion, or the tongues of fire that appeared over the Apostle's heads on Pentecost. For many English families in Victorian times the expensive and labor-intensive Christmas pudding was the quintessential Christmas dish. For many, it was not a proper Christmas feast without a Christmas pudding.

I doubt any of us will go home this afternoon and *stir up* a Christmas pudding. If you do, let me know! But today we pray that God will *stir us up*, that we will bring forth the fruit of good works, the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We prepare ourselves this Advent so that this spiritual fruit can mature before we meet Christ sacramentally and spiritually on Christmas Day. But what do we mean by praying *stir up we beseech thee, O, Lord*? For some, the season alone is enough to *stir up* their wills. They are inspired by displays of *peace on earth, good will to men*, and so they strive to live in charity and peace with friends and family for the sake of the Christmas season. Some God *stirs up* through memories of Christmases past, memories of beloved family members who have gone on before us. For others, God *stirs up* their wills through surprises, the unexpected but thoughtful gift or the random act of kindness. Although most of these displays of seemingly Christ-like behavior are just artificial, yet we are entering the season where it seems it can finally be said, as it was said on that first Palm Sunday, *the whole world has gone after Christ*.

But for others, the Lord *stirs up* the wills of His faithful people by using more dire situations. We find an example of this in today's Gospel. A great multitude of men, women, and children had followed the Lord out into the wilderness to sit at His feet, to hear Him preach. And He was moved to compassion for them, they had come

all this way and many likely had nothing to eat. So moved by Divine Charity, Jesus asks His disciple Philip, *where may we buy bread that they may eat?* Philip's reply was the practical reply, *Lord we do not have enough money to buy bread for everyone here, that they may all take even a little.* And even if they had the money, the local villages would not have enough bread for them to buy. The Gospel tells us that Jesus was up to something, for He asked Philip already knowing what He would do. Andrew seemed to have some idea of what Jesus was capable of and brought to Jesus a little boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish, a typical meal for the poor. We know how the story ends, Jesus took the poor meal, blessed it, and fed the multitude, five thousand men, and numberless women and children until they were all full, with not just bread but fish also. All who witnessed this miracle, including Philip and Andrew, were amazed at the miracle that Jesus had worked and said, *this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

The Lord asked Philip, *where may we buy bread that these may eat,* but *He asked him this to prove him, for He knew what He would do.* Philip's reply was that they did not have enough money, what gets translated as a *pennyworth*, is really a *denarii*, a day's wage. Philip tells Jesus that almost a year's worth of wages would not buy enough bread to feed the crowd. Jesus pushes Philip's imagination and faith to its limit. Even Andrew, the first disciple, who brought his brother Peter to Jesus, and brings the boy with the loaves and fish to Jesus, is amazed by this miracle. Jesus knows the faith of Philip and Andrew and to help make their faith in Him stronger He points out to them the impossibility of the situation and then works a miracle. He does this so that their faith may be all the stronger, that they have no doubt that He is the Son of God and God in the flesh, and to prepare them for their new lives in Him.

This week as we prepare for our Thanksgiving Day feasts, and in the coming weeks for our Christmas feasts, let us use this season to our advantage, and remember that Christ wishes *to stir up our wills and our faith.* In *stirring up* our faith, He challenges us to not get caught up in the materialism of the secular holiday, and to seek the true gift and the true feast that we have desired for so long. That true gift and true feast which many try in vain to replace with the best the world can offer. In *stirring up* our faith, Christ *stirs up* in us the fruits of the Holy Spirit that they may mature in us and help us to feast this Christmas in His presence, and to receive the true gift which Christ offers, the gift of a new life in Him. We begin this Advent praying that God will *stir us up*, and that we will prepare ourselves through this holy season of Advent to meet Him spiritually and sacramentally this Christmas. Amen.