Aug 2nd 2026 - Trinity 9
Matthew 14.13-21
Fr Christian

In today's readings, we hear of the compassion of God for his people. Through the prophet Isaiah, God invites those who are thirsty - not so much for water, but for righteousness, justice, peace, and for God himself. Then, in Romans, we hear the same compassion echoed in St Paul, who says he would even be willing to give himself up for the sake of Israel, his own people, if only they might come to know Christ.

In the Gospel, this compassion is no longer simply spoken - it is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. In the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand the people sat on grass – and this mention of 'sitting on grass' is striking because it echoes the prophecies of God's coming to shepherd his people: *"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep... I will make them lie down,"* (Ez 34:15) and also in the Psalms (23): *"The Lord is my shepherd... he makes me lie down in green pastures."* In this event, Matthew revealed the promised Shepherd was among them. To understand the significance of this message, it is proper to look at the background of the event: Just before this passage, Jesus was rejected in Nazareth. He said, *"A prophet is not without honour except in his own town."* He was rejected as someone who spoke for God, like a prophet. Then, only days later, John the Baptist was martyred by Herod Antipas—a tetrarch, a ruler who was meant to govern God's people, yet instead puts to death the greatest of the prophets.

Matthew paints a sobering picture here. **The prophets are no longer welcomed, they are silenced and martyred, and the rulers of the land no longer shepherd the people faithfully.** Instead of serving God's purposes, they pursue their own political ambitions. As a result, the people have become desolate, without a guide. Against this background, Matthew reveals who Jesus truly is. He is both the Prophet like Moses and the King like David - the one who will lead God's people as God had intended. In Jesus, Matthew shows God's way of shepherding the people.

First, with compassion. Matthew simply tells us, *"He had compassion on them."* Again and again throughout the Old Testament, the Lord reveals himself as a God of compassion. In Isaiah 55, he lovingly calls, *"Come, all who are thirsty... Come, buy and eat."* Then, in the following chapter, Isaiah (56) proclaims that God's salvation will extend even to those who once believed themselves to be far from his covenant. Such is the wideness of God's compassion.

Secondly, a prophet like Moses will shepherd God's people. When Israel wandered in the wilderness, Moses prayed, and God sent manna from heaven. Now Jesus stands in another wilderness, a desolate place both spiritually and politically. This new Moses, Jesus, would also intercede and feed the people in desolation. Later, he would tell his disciples that he was greater than Moses because he was the true bread from heaven, with whom people would truly be satisfied.

Thirdly, a king like David will shepherd God's people**.** Matthew tells us that after Jesus fed the crowds, *"They all ate and were satisfied."* The Jewish audience would connect this to divine kingship as seen in the words of the Psalmist (78): *"He chose David to shepherd Jacob his people."* The promised King was to shepherd God's flock.

With this in mind, let us consider how Matthew contrasts Jesus and Herod Antipas: Herod Antipas holds a banquet in a palace. Only the privileged were invited. It was a feast marked by wealth, power, political pride – and yet it ended with the death of an innocent man. On the other hand, Jesus prepared a banquet in the open countryside. All types of social class were welcomed. It is marked by compassion, generosity, and grace. Instead of ending in death, it ended in abundant life, with everyone fed and satisfied.

The feeding of the five thousand is much more than a miracle about bread and fish. It is a revelation of who Jesus is: the miracle that God was indeed in the flesh, that the compassionate Shepherd was with them. Matthew reveals that Jesus is the Prophet greater than Moses, feeding God's people with the true Bread from heaven; that he is the Shepherd-King greater than David, gathering the scattered, welcoming the forgotten, and satisfying the hungry. He is a revelation of God's compassion to the world: The crowds came to Jesus in a desolate place yet Christ did not turn them away. He looked upon them with compassion when they felt that no one cared for them. He took the little they had and made a miracle out of it. They discovered that in Christ, God could turn desolation into satisfaction.

Perhaps, the miracle is not just about the people that were filled, but about you today, who in the same situation find yourself in desolation – a sense of isolation and forsakenness. Perhaps you feel you have come to the end of your strength, like the disciples "we have nothing but these loaves and fish". Perhaps all you have left is a little hope. Bring that little to Christ. Place it into his hands, and know that he still looks upon you with compassion. With that in mind, sit a while on the grass of prayer, and wait until he will make a miracle out of the little we place before him…and he shall satisfy you again.

Amen.