

The miracle that hides between the lines

For many people and for many centuries in Gospel accounts like today's about the multiplication of loaves and fishes, it's the miracle that stands out in big letters – “proving” that Jesus had a signature power to heal, feed, walk on water, turn water into wine, raise the dead . . . Yet the early fathers of the Church and true biblical scholars today have heard *more* than that in such readings. Indeed, may it not have happened that, in hearing just the *letter* of such miracle stories – off the surface – passively – they may have become so familiar as to go in one ear and out the other? When have you heard any member of the congregation say Wow! after the Gospel reader has narrated a miracle story?

There is that famous scene in Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* in which the poor Oliver is confined to an orphanage managed by a stingy Mr. Bumble. He is selected by the other boys to confront Mr. Bumble with his empty bowl during their meager dinner of gruel and to ask: *Please, sir . . . I want some more. . . . What, said the master . . . in a faint voice.* Oliver repeats his request. *The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle . . .* The orphanage overseers, upon hearing of the request, conclude: *That boy will be hung.*

We live in times when a lot of people – marginalized in one way or another to the wealth of modern society – are asking for *more* – in no uncertain terms, not as timidly as Oliver. Periodically this has often happened in recent centuries. But is it just the marginal citizens who demand *more*? *Everybody* wants more – even the billionaires. There never seems to be enough even when some have more than they will ever need. *Everybody* wants more. *Everybody* feels he/she is living precariously. So why should Citizen Kane be surprised if the Oliver's of our world want more? We are *all* susceptible to having nothing at all – especially as we grow older, vitality diminished. So there is an Oliver Twist in everybody – wanting more out of life – *materially of course in the name of justice!*

But is that all? And could it be that each of us already has and is *more* than we realize? That's where today's miracle story comes in. Jesus has led a large crowd into an undeveloped region (our undeveloped selves?). His disciples worry about the crowd's hunger. What to do? Jesus says: *Give them some food yourselves.* They start counting what little they have to give – five loaves, two fishes. *That's all we have.* But what is Jesus ultimately saying, something they don't seem to get? *Give them some food yourselves – amounting, as you think, to so little, five loaves and two fishes. But don't you realize you are so much more than you think, so much more than "society" would have you think? Within your merely "five loaves and two fishes" there is more than enough to nourish everyone you meet – with affirmation, grace, generous giving, service, justice - because you are the offspring, indeed conscious consequence of a Source – a wellspring inexhaustible.*

There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.

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