

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, in the United States, the train bombing of March 11, 2004, in Madrid Spain and the Subway and bus bombings in London, a sense of loss and pain held all three nations in its grip. Many worked through their grief by lending a hand to help others. Volunteers came forth to feed the firefighters and law enforcement officers. Homes were opened to offer hospitality and support. All grieved and prayed and helped one another, and in their grieving and praying and helping, the citizens of these nations moved forward together in the process of healing.

A similar experience of loss, though only briefly alluded to, lies at the heart of today's Gospel. As mention, John the Baptizer had just been put to death by Herod and Jesus had withdrawn to a deserted place to pray. Many things were probably weighing heavily on Jesus' mind after receiving such awful news. Should he stay and risk being killed himself or should he leave? Should he keep a low profile or just drop out of sight? Jesus chose to do none of these things. Instead, he allowed himself to be found by the crowds, and, moved with compassion for them, he healed their hurts and fed their hungers.

Moreover, he shared this ministry of mercy with his disciples. In Matthew's telling of the loaves event, the disciples are indispensable. It is they who saw the need and informed Jesus. They found and brought the loaves and fish; they distributed the food and then collected the leftovers. They

offered all future disciples an example of what it means to participate in the ministry of Jesus. The disciples learned about concern for the hungry. In the act of doing what Jesus asked they discovered compassion for the poor. They became more like Jesus.

What we learn is that it devolves upon Jesus' disciples to take his words to heart ("Give them something to eat yourselves") and make his ministry of healing the hurting and feeding the hungry our own.

Jesus teaches us today that the greatest mistake is to do nothing because we feel we can do only a little. But a little can go a long way.