

Today's Gospel reading of the Feeding of the Five thousand is a story which is so familiar, yet it always seems to turn up something new to think about.

As I reflected on it in the light of our Covid dominated world, the phrase which sprang into my mind was "gather up the fragments".

I have found in my own experience of life that it is often after times of great personal challenge, and even apparent destruction, that God has helped me to "gather up the fragments of my life", and has used them to inspire me, with God's help, to do something new and positive.

Many people have had experiences pain and loss in all sorts of ways during this time of pandemic, whether the illness and or death of loved-ones, or the other losses to do with loss of normality; the loss of a sense of safety when going about our daily lives; the loss of income and livelihoods for many; the loss of physical connection with one another, as we try to maintain relationships via the phone or on Zoom....these are just a few of the ways in which fragmentation has been happening on a micro, as well as a macro level during this harrowing time of pandemic.

Jesus himself was no stranger to pain and loss. The story of the feeding of the five thousand comes at a time when Jesus needed to be alone to pass the days of mourning in solitude in a retreat across the lake of Galilee, following the tragic loss of his cousin and colleague, John the Baptist. John had died in a manner which might also have made Jesus wonder what sort of fate might also be ahead for him.

Yet, in the midst of his own personal pain and torment, Jesus reached out with compassion to those who needed his help; and the way in which he did this was to take what was available and to use it for great good. We notice that in order to bring it about, he took what was brought to him by his followers, and transformed it, so that we can only look with amazement to see what he did with the meagre rations which were brought to him.

The connection I made between this story and the stories of so many people who have suffered in various ways through the

experiences since Covid came into our lives is that, despite the fragmentation of society, and the individual challenges it has brought, many have found a way to build something positive and good out of a really horrible time.

Maybe we feel we are "running on empty" and have very little in the way of resources at the moment, but that's OK. Many of us are feeling like that - I know I am, if not exactly running on empty, am running on reduced energy as a result of not being able to gather as a worshipping community, and being deprived of receiving the sacrament for so long.

But as we can now come together in joy to be fed by Our Lord from the fragments of his body, broken for us, God will give us what we need, so that we can become part of his purposes for his fragmented world and have something to offer it, despite our sense of our own inadequacy.

Whether as individuals, or as a church, we need to ask ourselves whether we are willing to be used by Our Lord in this way, in order that we may increase our love and compassion and live out the Good news of God's love in this place.