

## Don't Overthink the Problem, Solve It

**Intro.** At one of the Masses last Sunday when I washed my hands, the servers told me there was no towel to dry my hands. So I asked if I could dry them on my pants. One of the servers immediately held out her sleeve, inviting me to wipe them on it. I was surprised and laughed because she immediately came up with a solution to the problem. In today's gospel, two adults couldn't figure out a solution to feeding the crowd. A *young boy* had an idea *how to find* the solution and look what happened.

**I.** In this translation, the Lord asked Philip "*where*" they could buy enough food for everyone. In another translation he said, "*How* are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip's answer seems to respond more closely to the *how* rather than the *where*. Philip was thinking of *how much* it would cost. From his days in the fishing business Philip seemed to have a good grasp on the

cost of food and how much was needed. He quickly said no way, knowing they didn't have the money. Andrew took his turn to come up with an answer. Maybe the young boy overheard the conversation and tugged on Andrew's sleeve, "Hey, mister. I have five barley loaves and a couple of fish. Will that help?" Andrew's first response was to dismiss the boy and his offer as too little. The Lord chose the boy's plan. The Lord took the child's gift and multiplied it so that all ate their fill. And there was an abundance of leftovers. The miracle had the result the Lord wanted. People came to believe he was the prophet-messiah they were expecting. But it was an *incomplete* understanding. They wanted him to be a *king* and they were about to force that expectation on him so he retreated to the mountains. *This time they **did not** find him.* That left the disciples with the crowd and all that bread. We don't know **how** they solved that.

**Concl.** What do we do when we find a problem that seems too large to solve? One solution is to pass it off to someone else so the failure is not on us. This happens in all kinds of work. Another is to take it on and develop multiple strategies, believing a combination of answers will meet the need. Even though the Lord knew what he was going to do, he asked Philip for his idea. Philip said can't do it, it *cost too much*. A young boy offered Andrew five loaves and two fish. But he too said can't do, it's *not enough*. After being with the Lord from the start of the ministry, they don't seem to have learned much. Other than to depend on the Lord to solve all problems. Time for another lesson in leadership: rather than focus on what you *don't* have, start with what you *do* have. Not all of us can do miracles like feed more than five thousand people with some bread and fish. But many of us have done things pretty close to miraculous in our lives here at home

and in distant parts of the world. Food banks and medical clinics have been opened. The problem of finding clean drinking water where there is none has spawned new technologies for wells and water purification. As adults we sometimes take a complicated view of problems. Another option is to ask a young person; they often have a simple and direct way of looking at things. Maybe this is what the Lord meant when he said we must be child-like in following him. The presence of God is certainly found by studying theology and scripture. But He is also found in the simple offering of a sleeve to dry one's hands on and a boy's offering of bread and fish.