

In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Many of us wonder, and probably secretly complain, that there are very few miracles these days, especially like the one we read about today in the Gospel. Yet, I would propose to you that actually there are countless miracles all around us occurring on a regular basis but it is we who fail to recognize them as such. Where would one start? The beauty, grandeur, complexity, and consistency of the physical universe from the macro to the micro; the ruggedness resilience yet sensitivity of the human body coupled with the ability to think, speak, plan, dream, create, and even communicate with our unseen Creator. And with all the new children around, who could forget the miracle that is the bringing into being of a new person from conception to birth, and all stages of development from child to adult. Even many of the achievements of mankind are not without their help and inspiration from above. Of course with those there are many people who have worked hard and devoted their lives in the effort to alleviate their fellow man's sufferings. But often helpful, live saving discoveries are the result of unexpected inspiration or apparently chance circumstance of events. Consider much of our modern medicine. Even though modern medicine using the physical world God created, is it anything less than amazing and miraculous?

One of my favorite examples is the discovery that literally changed the world – Penicillin. As we all know Penicillin is an antibiotic having the ability to kill bacterial infections that we may have contracted in variety of ways but which often causes tremendous

problems, fever, pain, and even the potential of physical death. The scientist credited with the initial discovery of this antibacterial agent ( Dr. Fleming) was indeed looking for a ‘miracle drug’ but it was through a series of multiple happenstances that this discovery was made. In brief, he had been working with multiple bacterial cultures grown in petri dishes and testing all kinds of substances to see if any retarded bacterial growth. He had some minor discoveries but nothing significant. Then, in preparing for a vacation so that someone else could use his work space, he cleared his bench of all his active Petri dishes. Most of them he put in a bath of disinfectant but there were too many to fit in the bath at one time. So, he left the surplus on the side to be cleaned when he returned. After coming back to work, and before he had the opportunity to clean up the mess he left behind, he was surprised with a visit from his former assistant who had taken a lab position elsewhere. Fleming was griping about all the work that had piled up since his friend and assistant had left and was demonstrating by rummaging through the petri dishes that were waiting to be cleaned. In this brief, almost joking, encounter, Flemings’ eyes noticed a Petri dish which had a section of mold growth (which was not strange since they had been sitting unprotected out in the air for so long). However, that mold appeared to have killed the bacterial growth all around it. Realizing this had potential; he set the dish aside and cultivated more samples of this mold. Working together with a mycologist (a mycologist is one who studies fungus and mold) whose office just happened to be below Flemings’, they determined the mold to be Penicillium mold. It was almost a

decade later, during WWII, that two chemists, using this discovery, worked together to isolate the agent and produce a stable compound that could be readily produced, transported and used by people. And as we all know, this really was a miracle drug that has positively impacted lives in countless ways from eliminating all kinds of bacterial infections to preventing them from occurring after injuries and surgeries. Yet all of this hinged on so many seeming coincidences – a mycologist – where undoubtedly the mold came from- working near a bacteriologist; a lengthy period of time to cultivate the mold – while he was on vacation; an overworked scientist complaining to a friend, etc. Who could call this anything but miraculous in its discovery? And then there is the story of the Brazilian snake called ‘Two step Johnny’ who was so named because when someone was bitten they would take two steps backwards and die. Upon extensive investigation in autopsy, it was discovered that the venom had the ability to completely and instantly collapse the blood pressure in the one bitten. Using this in controlled fashion, this venom gave rise to the first blood pressure medication that so many people take to reduce blood pressure and improve health and was produced by our local company Bristol Myers Squibb. That’s pretty wild and miraculous that a deadly poisons snake could be used to improve the health of millions of people!! And the list could go on and on.

Likewise when we look at this miracle today of the feeding of the multitude; it seems so extraordinary – which it is – yet are we not surrounded by similar miracles like this every day or at least every

year? All of us either now or at some time have had summer gardens of tomatoes, squash, beans, berries, fruit trees, and flowers. And when we drive through the countryside we see fields of corn, wheat, oats, and soybeans. We may buy the small plants from the store but virtually all of these plants have grown from incredibly tiny seeds which with a little care, water, sunshine, and good soil, produce a million fold of the size of the seed. Is this not just a slow motion miracle of the multiplication of food like the one Jesus performed in the Gospel today? Yet because this miracle consistently occurs in our lives and is so common, we have a tendency to eventually take it for granted and not even notice its awesome nature. Certainly we, or others, have made the effort and spent the time to come to understand some of the mechanisms involved in this process of seed to fruit and how to improve the health of the plants and yield. Yet understanding some of the mechanisms, though important, is only a small contributing part compared to the essential nature of this dependable and repeating miracle.

And speaking about making a contribution, notice too with the Lord in this miracle, when the disciples suggest to the Lord that He send the hungry multitude away, He responds with compassion and humility but saying “**You** give them something to eat.” They quickly realize that they have almost no money and can only produce 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Yet Jesus says it is enough and has everyone sit down in an organized fashion, looks to Heaven, blesses and gives to the Apostles to distribute. Think for a

moment; Christ is God with the creative power to immediately change 5 loaves and 2 fishes into such a super abundance that there were 12 baskets left over. Why did He not simply say the word and produce for everyone a biodegradable or, better yet, eatable lunch box containing their favorite food and beverage with each persons' name and favorite NFL team logo embossed on the front? And in addition for the youngsters include a toy to play with on the long trip home. No fuss, no mess, nothing to clean up, no having to organize a hungry, tired crowd in groups. Everyone would be full and happy. Obviously, I am making some fun with this but you probably get the point. Jesus could have performed this miracle in many different ways but choose to fulfill the real need of the people, keep the theatrics to a minimum, keep the limelight away from Himself, and involve other people (the apostles) in the work. So, it is with us today. Archbishop Andrei writes that the manner in which the multitude was fed in this miracle is actually Christ's initial direction for and establishment of the **organization of the Church** which is, as we know, the continuation of His body after His death, Resurrection and Ascension. We all come to Church to worship because Christ is present among us and feeds us through the body of His Church – through the services, the Holy Icons, the incense, the sacred scriptures, the signing and through the ordained clergy who have been given the responsibility and honor to distribute His precious body and blood. All of this is a means, if you will, of bringing the heavenly food, which is Christ, directly into our lives. And it all happens through **people**. Of course this does not mean that we cannot and do not have personal,

individual relationship and connection with Our Lord but there is something unique, special, and full when we gather together. This fullness is never so obvious as when the ecclesia, or body of the Church, gathers together at events like the Convention or in a smaller way at our Church feast day. When we are all together with Metropolitan Joseph who has received through the laying on of hands the full Apostolic gifts handed down from Christ and has remained faithful to them, there is a Grace and richness that is unmistakable. You may not notice it immediately when He is around but if you stay for a while, something of the beauty of the Heavenly world breaks through and your spirit is nourished like the multitude was healed and fed in the desert. In the coming weeks I would encourage everyone to make every effort to set aside as much time as possible to be at all of the Vigil, early to Church on Sunday, and for the picnic which follows. Just like the people who followed Jesus into the dessert, we will need to make an effort in order to be in the place to receive this blessing and linger until it comes. I would also encourage everyone to look around yourselves and take the time to consider on your own some of the countless, wonderful and miraculous events that surround you every day and in which you participate. You will find by looking for these miracles your eyes will be opened and you will see more and more of them around you. They will become a living witness and reminder of Christ in your life and the world around you and also the strengthening of your faith in His compassion and mercy which He extends to us all as He extended to the hungry multitude in today's Gospel. May it be so for all of us. Amen

