

We don't know how miracles happen. How did nine miners trapped in Pennsylvania stay alive until rescuers penetrated the dark earth above them? How is a baby formed in the womb? How did five loaves and two fish feed more than five thousand people? We don't know how miracles happen. That's why we call them miracles.

Matthew does not tell us how the loaves and fish fed so many, but he does say why Jesus and the crowd got into this predicament. People came because they wanted Jesus to cure their sick. They left home so eagerly they neglected to bring any food. Eventually they got hungry. That is why the crowds were ripe for this miracle.

Jesus went there for a different reason. According to Matthew, Jesus was trying to get away from everybody. He had just learned that Herod had killed John the Baptist at the request of a girl who danced at the king's birthday party. Sorrowful at the loss of his mentor, frightened that he could be next, Jesus wanted to be alone. What a contrast between these meals: Herod threw a banquet of rich food in a royal palace, while Jesus served bread and fish in a deserted place. Herod's guests entertained jealousy, avarice and murder. Jesus' guests grew in faith, trust and life.

We don't know how this miracle happened. We know why it happened: Jesus came with sorrow, and the crowds came with hope.

When we gather at this table for the banquet of the eucharist, we come with reasons similar to that crowd. We bring our needs to Jesus, the ailing members of our families and the hurts we hold. We come with hope because we have felt Christ active in our lives before. We have experienced healing and love. We have respected the wisdom of his words, even the ones that are hard to obey. We come with hope. We also come eager. We arrange our schedules to be here. We fast an hour before communion. We dress at home. We greet people here. We pray before the service begins. In many little ways we show how eager we are for the miracle that happens on this table.

After the miracle of the loaves, the crowds probably realized how much they take bread and fish for granted. We realize how much we take for granted whenever we see believers around us, the birth of a child and the rescue of a miner, the beauty of a song and the greatest miracle of all, concealed under the signs of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.