

Cathy and I both have brothers in the Albany area, and whenever we make a trip out that way, we pass the Shrine of the Christian Martyrs in Auriesville....This never fails to stir up wonderful childhood memories for Cathy....Sometimes we stop there; sometimes we don't....Either way, Cathy will always retell the story of how every summer her family would pack into the family car along with a feast of mouthwatering food from her grandmother's Italian kitchen and make its annual pilgrimage to Auriesville....I've heard this story so many times I know it by heart,...but like any smart husband (oxymoron?) I try to act interested each time she tells it,...because I know how precious the memories of this family tradition are to her...Besides, she'd kill me if I didn't!....I think it's kind of the same thing with this story of the miracle of the loaves and fish...We've heard it so many times, it's easy to go, "Ho-hum...Yah, OK...Jesus fed thousands of people w a few loaves and fish...I know, I know."...Sometimes, though, we can read or hear a scripture passage for the umpteenth time and something will jump out that we hadn't caught before....That's what happened to me with this Gospel story...I've preached on it many times, but this time, something new hit me.... and it's this: *Jesus doesn't want to ever hear us say, "Lord, I just can't do this!"...Jesus will not accept, "Lord, this is too hard for me...I can't do it!"*

Let's look at the interchange between Jesus and His disciples...The disciples are concerned about the huge crowd of hungry people and so they go to Jesus: "Lord, we got a problem here; this crowd is hungry. Send them away to get some supper."...Then Jesus says, "Let them stay. You solve the problem. You feed them."...."Are you serious, Lord ? There's not enough. We can't do it! We only have 5 loaves and 2 fish."...You know, they were right...They didn't have enough...But what they didn't have enough of was FAITH....faith....It was like they totally forgot who they were talking to...They forgot that right there in front of them was the One who had healed lepers, expelled demons, and calmed the roaring sea. ...They had seen what He could do, and yet – faced with this seemingly impossible task of feeding thousands with just a few scraps– they threw up their hands...."We can't do it, Jesus."...You see wut happened here? ...Jesus calls on His disciples to deal with a very difficult problem...They respond, "Lord, we can't do it. We only have 5 loaves and 2 fish."...Jesus doesn't accept that answer...He knows they can do it...Sure, they needed His help...So He tells them to bring Him the little that they have, and He takes it and changes it into more than enough for the disciples to feed all those hungry people.

And that, my friends, is the Good News I want us to take from this Gospel today...that when we are facing a tough situation or trouble or problem and we don't think we have the resources to get through it,...we have a Lord who says to us, "I don't want to hear, 'I can't do it!'....I don't want to hear that...Just bring me the little that you have and I will turn it into a lot so that you CAN do it."...That's the Good News for those of us – like me – who forget that our main resource, our main source of strength is Jesus Christ....We focus too much on how little we can do, and too little on what Jesus Christ can do...We have a Savior who loves us too much to let us give up....That's the Good News for us this morning.

That's the Good News if you are desperately trying to make a go of a troubled marriage, ...and nothing seems to work...When you're on the verge of throwing in the towel - "It's no use...We give up ...It's over!" - Jesus is saying to you, "Hold on,...We are in this together...Did you forget I was there; I was part of the marriage covenant when you two promised to stick it out in good times and in bad?...You may feel like you don't have what it takes to work things out,...but give me what you do have – your love, your commitment, your faith - and I will make them enough so that you will hang in there and keep on trying.

That's the Good News for all of us moms and dads who find ourselves wondering, "Do I have what it takes to be an adequate parent...not even a GOOD one...just an adequate one?"...Take it from me – folks – the job doesn't get easier when they are supposedly out on their own. They are never completely on their own...When we get to feeling inadequate, when we feel like all we have are "5 loaves and 2 fish,"...we have a friend who whispers to us, "Bring them to me – all of your wisdom and your skills as a parent - and I will make them enough for you to handle the task at hand.

That's the Good News if you are in the grip of a potentially destructive addiction, and you don't think you are strong enough or have willpower enough to break loose from its grip...Truth is, you aren't strong enough or determined enough,...but there is someone who is...And He says to you, "Bring me the little strength and willpower you have...Bring them to me, and I will make them enough for you to break free from whatever habit or dependence is keeping you from being a holy child of God.

That's the Good News for you teens and young people trying to stay on the right path in the face of so many worldly influences, pressures and temptations...not sure you're strong enough to withstand them...St. Paul tells us in 1Cor10:13: "God will never allow you to be tempted beyond your strength; He will provide you a way to resist it."...That way is Jesus Christ!...The Good News is you have a friend who loves you (did you hear St. Paul in our 2nd reading?)...and says to you, "Bring me your strength...Bring it to me...no matter how little it is,,and trust me...I will turn it into enough for you to resist all of Satan's attempts to steal you away from me."

A few weekends ago, at the Catholic Youth Conference in Steubenville, 2500 teens (35 of ours) heard Fr. Jose' tell them that whenever they were being tempted or pressured to do the wrong thing, they needed to pray to Jesus...They needed to call on Jesus to give them His strength. ...because Satan was too strong for them....He told them that if they really believed that Jesus was there with them in the middle of their struggle, they would feel His strength going through them and they would be able to resist all of the enemy's attacks....Fr. Jose' even gave them the words to use...When someone says to you, "Come on, try a joint...one puff isn't gonna hurt you,"...just say, "**I don't think so, baby!**"...When the crowd tells you to stop being a party pooper and have a drink, say, "I don't think so, baby!"...If a buddy tries to get you to come over to look at his porn collection,...tell him, "I don't think so, baby!"...When your boyfriend or girlfriend pressures you to go all the way,...just say, "I don't think so, baby!"...The Good News is that whatever the temptation, Jesus will give you the strength to say, "I don't think so, baby!"...And this isn't only for teens...It's for all of us. Try it. "I don't think so, baby!"...With Jesus' help, we won't give in.

That's the Good News for those of us who look around and see a world where there is so much need: people going hungry...families without adequate health care...children growing up in high-crime, drug-filled neighborhoods...children getting a 2nd-rate education – if any....people emotionally or spiritually lost and alone...and so much more misery and need...We look around and we ask "What can I do with the little I have?...How can I feed so many?...How can I fund so many?...How can I help so many? ...I don't have enough money...I don't have enough energy. ...I don't have the right training...I'm not smart enough...I can't make any real difference....All I have are a few loaves and a few fish."...But Jesus won't listen to this...He tells us, "Give me your energy, your resources, your faith, your wisdom, your compassion...Give me the little you have and I'll make sure it's enough for you to go out and make a difference....Trust me, because I need you to do this."

I recently heard the story of a man named Pat who had received a pre-Christmas gift from his brother...It was a beautiful new car – fully loaded and ready to go...On Christmas eve, when

Pat was leaving work, he saw a scruffy looking street kid walking around his shiny new car and admiring it. "Is this your new car, mister?" the kid asked...Pat told him that it was his car and that his brother had given it to him for Christmas...When he heard this, the boy exclaimed, "Really!...You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn't cost you anything?...Free?...For nothing?...Gosh, I wish..."

The boy hesitated, and Pat knew what he was about to say...He had heard it many times over the past few days...The kid was going to say he wished he had a brother like that...But this boy shocked Pat when instead he said, "I wish...I wish I could be a brother like that."

My friends, you & I can be a brother like that, or a sister like that...All it takes is that we bring before Jesus what we have: our faith, our financial resources, our abilities and gifts, our willingness to do what he wants, & lay them at his feet....He will take it from there...He will turn our paltry handful of loaves & fish into a magnificent feast...And He will command us as He did His disciples. "Now you go and feed them." AMEN!