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“I cannot carry all this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me” (Num 11:14).

The burden of leadership is highlighted in both of today’s readings. Moses is weighed down by the demands of the people for food in the desert to the point that he asks God to take his life. Jesus, grieving after the death of John the Baptist, tries to withdraw but encounters a large, hungry crowd waiting for him in the wilderness. Unlike Moses, he is moved with pity and multiplies bread and fish to feed over 5,000 people.

Comparing Moses to Jesus was a central theme of Matthew’s Gospel, written for a largely Jewish Christian community in Antioch of Syria. Matthew divides his Gospel into five units, like the five books of the Torah. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount parallels Moses receiving the Law from God and explaining it to the people. The wilderness miracles compare to the manna stories in the desert. Jesus fulfills one prophecy after another and completes the challenges Moses faced without success.

We can sympathize with Moses, caught between God and the people, who complain about the rigors of freedom after their exodus from slavery. When things don’t go well, they blame Moses, who then goes to God to get relief or to soothe the divine wrath against an ungrateful and faithless people. Moses stands in the breach between the divine and human, prefiguring Jesus, who reconciles the two in himself. Moses, in despair, asks God to end his life. Jesus, in the ultimate act of hope, offers his life to repair the breach between heaven and earth and to open the way to the new Creation.

The challenge to imitate Jesus is great. What pastor or parent has not reached the limits of their energy trying to meet the needs of a parish or a family in times of crisis? Who has not gone to their knees in prayer after exhausting every other resource to solve a difficult problem? The story of Jesus facing the huge crowd is directed to the disciples who have thrown up their hands at the impossibility of meeting the needs of so many. He says to them, "Give them some food yourselves." Without explaining how, the story records that everyone was fed, with 12 baskets of scraps left over. It is a story of faith, and we are asked to trust that God provides.

Are Jesus' promises about the power of prayer true? We will only know if we pray.

Does God provide? We will only know if we put ourselves in situations of need and ask for God's help. Are we disciples? Only if we act like disciples when called upon to act as Jesus did. The joy of the Gospel comes to those who live by it.

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