

- On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, not too far from the ruins of the ancient city of Capernaum, is an area known as Tabgha. Christian tradition holds that this is a place that our Lord often visited for the beauty and solitude it provided.
- It is also the site of today's Gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. In fact there is a church and Benedictine monastery in Tabgha that mark the spot of where this miracle took place.
- The current church, which is less than 30 years old, was built on the site of a 4th century church that was probably destroyed in 614 during the Persian invasion of the Holy Land.
- While the church and monastery in Tabgha are quite beautiful, what is most interesting is the rock jutting out of the floor over which the altar is built. Tradition holds that it was on this rock that Jesus laid the 2 fish and 5 loaves that were multiplied to feed the hungry crowds.
- Directly in front of the rock and the altar is a famous mosaic from the original 4th century church that depicts two fish and a basket with four loaves of bread in it. You'll remember, however, that today's Gospel story mentions five loaves of bread.
- The fifth loaf is represented by the Eucharistic bread that is confectioned upon the altar at Mass and that is broken and shared, just as the bread in today's Gospel story was broken and shared amongst the people.
- So as this beautiful 4th century mosaic indicates, today's miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is a foreshadowing of the miracle of the Eucharist.
- In fact, if we were to keep reading in the Gospel of John, we find that today's Gospel story leads us into St. John's famous Discourse on the Bread of Life, which is the scriptural basis of the Church's teaching on the Eucharist.
- But today's Gospel does more than teach us about the Eucharist. Today's Gospel story shows us once again how generously our Lord provides for us, always giving us exactly what we need, when we need it.
- Thus, this Gospel story serves as both an invitation and a challenge for us to trust in God's providence. Certainly for those of us who profess the Christian faith, it is good for us to consider the question: Do I trust God? Do I really believe that God will care for all my needs?
- Sadly, we live in an age of great skepticism, and many people are not only skeptical of God's trustworthiness, but some even doubt His very existence.
- And at times, especially when faced with terrible tragedies, we may be tempted to question God's goodness. In times of tragedy and overwhelming suffering it is quite normal to ask: "If God really loves us, why would He allow this terrible thing to happen?"
- Thus it is important to realize that because of the limitations of our human nature and because of our own sinfulness, we may not always understand our Lord. Our Lord is always rational, although we may not always understand His rationale.
- Yet while it is not always possible to understand why God allows certain tragic events to happen, there is a remedy for the doubts that plague us. That remedy is love.
- In a very broad sense, we see in today's Gospel another manifestation of God's tremendous love for us. And certainly in looking upon the crucifix and meditating on our Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection, it is readily apparent that God does love us – for there can be no other plausible reason for Jesus to suffer as He did outside of love for mankind.

- As I mentioned last week, the great question before mankind is not whether God loves us. God has made His love known in countless ways throughout the history of mankind. The great question for us is how we are going to respond to God's love.
- How we respond to God's love is vitally important, for it is through learning to love God as we should that our faith grows stronger than whatever doubts may creep into our minds.
- Recognizing God's tremendous love for us and responding to Him in kind drives the darkness of doubt from our hearts and strengthens our ability to see things as God sees them. And the very best way that we can love God as we should is to live a life of genuine holiness.
- In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul gives us some instruction today about living a life of holiness. He urges us "to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."
- Each of us is called by God to live a certain vocation: most of us are called to marriage, some of us are called to a single life, and others of us are called to the priesthood or consecrated life. Yet for each of us, our vocation is our means of growing in holiness.
- We grow in holiness through our vocation by living it well, by living up to the demands that our vocation puts upon us, and certainly each vocation has its own particular demands that can make living it well very difficult at times.
- For those of you called to be husbands and fathers, you grow in holiness by truly being the head of your household, not lording your authority over your family, but by sacrificing your own needs and wants in order to serve and provide for your wife and children.
- For those of you called to be wives and mothers, you grow in holiness by truly submitting to your husbands, supporting them and encouraging them in their leadership of your family, and by providing the proper love and nurturing that each family member needs.
- For those of you living as single people, your holiness is found in the service of others and by contributing to society in ways that those who have families cannot, especially through your prayers and sacrifices.
- Yet despite the differences in our vocations, the fruit of holiness that each vocation has the capacity to bear is the same: humility, gentleness, patience, peacefulness, and the capacity to bear with all things and all people through love.
- While our personal paths toward holiness may differ greatly, each of us – regardless of our particular vocation or state in life – is called to be holy. Holiness is not for a select few people; it is for us all. And by striving for the holiness proper to our state in life, we show God how much we love Him.
- Moreover, by learning to love God as we should, we also learn to trust Him unconditionally. Our love for God naturally conditions us to recognize His tremendous love for us even more acutely, making us much more willing to trust Him – even when we don't understand Him.
- My friends, as Christians we are called to respond to our Lord's generous and merciful love through loving obedience and by striving for holiness through our particular vocations. Holiness is indeed the greatest gift that we can ever give to God.
- May each of us today be renewed in our zeal for holiness and live out our vocations in a manner that truly glorifies our Lord. And in loving God as we should, may we each come to trust Him without reservation.