

Jamie Oliver is a British celebrity chef, and restaurant owner - who is possibly best known for his food-focused television shows, cookbooks and more recently his global campaign for better food education.

His first show on British television was “The Naked Chef.”

Now ... it’s what it might appear to be ... he keeps his clothes on.

But his approach to cooking is based on stripping down complicated methods and keeping things simple, and sticking to basics.

He made the news recently for his campaign against “pink slime” being used in fast food burgers. You might have seen his videos on the web where he shows kids how commercial burgers and chicken nuggets are made. Despite the controversy, the Queen of England bestowed on him the title Member of the Order of the British Empire.

Today is the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In the Gospel, we hear the familiar passage where Jesus feeds the 5,000 with just 5 loaves and two fish.

In recent times, there has been all sorts of discussion as to whether this is an actual miracle, or perhaps everybody was hoarding food - eventually sharing it, or maybe Jesus was just really good with a knife and cut each loaf into 1,000 very thin slices.

I’d have to say that all of that is just a distraction from the point.

In the reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we hear the admonition to “Come!” ... come and drink ... come and eat ... what the prophet lays out in this biblical image is an “all you can eat buffet.” And the catch? No catch. It’s all free!

But the prophet isn’t talking about some sort of new government lunch program ... and besides, we all know that there’s no such thing as a free lunch. In this life, in the end, somebody always ends up paying for it.

What the prophet is getting at ... what he’s doing ... is painting a verbal picture of what is called the “Messianic Banquet.” I suppose you could call it the “eternal super buffet at the end of time.” When the Messiah comes, he is saying, it will all be taken care of.

But this is an allegory. It means more than just food.

We know that the Messiah has come - in the person of Jesus Christ. And He has taken care of everything - paid the price ... so to speak - for our salvation ... on Calvary ... on the Cross.

In this Gospel, when Jesus feeds the 5,000 - and I'm going to say it was a miracle - He is giving them a tangible sign as a way to indicate to them that the Messiah is already here ... right now ... in their midst. They would know this reading from Isaiah, and they would see it as a sign of the presence of the Messiah.

And here they are, eating their fill ... with twelve baskets left over ... from a meager donation of 5 loaves and 2 fish. Did they get it? Or did they miss the forest for the trees?

So, what's the point? What does this mean for us ... today ... here and now? The point is, that Jesus takes whatever we give Him ... and amplifies it ... multiplies it ... perfects our gift through His redeeming grace.

The trick is - we've got to give Him something to work with. But whatever it is, the saving power of His Cross ... the infinite value of His sacrifice ... brings our own gift - whatever that is - to completion.

If we hold back ... if we refuse to engage those graces and that power ... well, nothing ventured - nothing gained. It's that simple.

St. Paul assures us that nothing can "*separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" And that "*through him who love us*" ... "*we conquer overwhelmingly.*"

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us take God up on this bargain. Let us give something to Christ Jesus ... freely, without reservation. Let us trust in His promise and tap into the saving power of His Cross and the infinite power of His redeeming graces.

Expect a miracle. Because through the love of God in Christ, the victory is ours in all things ... and God's generosity will always overwhelm us.