

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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It has been said that actions speak louder than words. But, actions like words can be misunderstood. An offer to help someone in need can be interpreted as a way to highlight their inadequacy. A generous donation to a charity can be seen as an attempt to show off one's wealth. A gift can be perceived as a way to influence someone's opinion. Even a good deed motivated by the best intention can produce the wrong response.

In today's Gospel, members of the crowd Jesus fed with five loaves and two fish ask him "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you?" The request seems to indicate that all it takes to believe in Christ is to witness a sign (miracle) which supports his claims about his identity and mission. Yet, this crowd has witnessed Jesus feed an enormous number of people with a limited amount of food and responded by wanting him to become their king. It also sees the gift of manna given for food to the Jewish people in the wilderness as a sign of Moses' authority. In both cases the problem was not the miracle but the framework within which it is understood. For the crowd, the meaning of the miracles was found in the material world. But, both miracles also revealed God's power and providential concern for His chosen people. This dimension was clearly misunderstood. If Jesus were to undertake some other great sign, how could he be certain they would not misinterpret it as well? Jesus himself is the ultimate sign of God's concern for the crowd and all humanity. It is for this reason that he is the bread of life. Yet, can the crowd ever grasp this idea?

During this Covid-19 pandemic even good deeds motivated with the best intentions are being misunderstood. Some conspiracy theorists have promoted the idea that self-isolation and social distancing measures are a plan by the government to take away our freedom and control our lives. Even discounting such fringe groups, there can be an element of misunderstanding around a person's actions. When does stocking up on key supplies like toilet paper or hand sanitizer become hoarding? When does checking up on elderly neighbours border on snooping? When does maintaining social isolation become a reason to stop caring about others? Perhaps, the key element in this issue is trust. We have to trust government and medical officials are placing the common good (stopping the spread of the virus) ahead of all other considerations. We have to trust our family, friends and neighbours are concerned about us. We have to trust others keeping two metres away from us is not a sign of ostracism. For Catholics and other people of faith, trust in God is meant to lead to trust in others. It means they must be willing to give others the benefit of the doubt. It means the framework through which they view the actions of others is one which sees good deeds and intentions even when they are not perfectly executed.

While good deeds and intentions can be misunderstood they are still the glue which holds our society together, especially in times of crisis.