

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of spiritual food that God gives us in order to spiritually nourish us and strengthen us on our journey to his kingdom.

The first reading is related to the situation of Israel in exile. In this difficult situation, God invites the people to come to him and receive what is missing in their lives in order to be happy, namely the basic satisfactions of food and drink.

Because God gives gratuitously food and drink, it would be foolish for them to spend the little money and wage they have to what cannot satisfy their needs. However, if they listen to God and obey him, he will make them rich in food and life. He will even renew his covenant with them and give them the benefits he once assured to David, their forefather.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the source of all good things we can enjoy in the world. Therefore, if we are obedient to him and listen to his insights, he can give us more than we can expect. The text challenges, too, because in our human craziness we often spend our money and our wage for things which directly ruin our health and our life.

All that helps us understand why in today's Gospel Jesus feeds abundantly more than five thousand people with just a little bit of food. In doing so, not only does he confirm that God takes care of his people in their needs, but he also shows that human fate in the end and human salvation depend on God alone.

Before coming to the scene of the feeding of the people, the Gospel says that Jesus' heart was moved with pity as he saw the vast crowd and he cured their sick. The expression, "being moved with pity", means literally having a strong feeling that leads to ultimately having compassion.

This deep compassion for the needs of others is the first condition that urges into action. In that perspective, it means that anyone who is insensitive to the needs of his fellows not only does not have the feelings of Jesus, but also he/she will never be moved into action. Of course, he/she can always give something like a gift when there is a need or when possible, but it will not be willingly and because his/her heart dictates him/her to do so. On the contrary, he/she will do it because he/she is obliged by the law.

After having showed compassion, Jesus feeds the crowd. Here we see a contrast between the attitude of the disciples and the attitude of Jesus. For the disciples, indeed, it would be better to dismiss the crowd so that they go to the villages and buy food for themselves. For Jesus, on the contrary, the disciples should give them food themselves.

What kind of logic is driving these two attitudes? The logic of the disciples is the logic of selfishness. Let me summarize it in this way: "*Each for himself and God for all*". It is this type of thinking that pushes them to say that they did have only five breads and two fish.

Anytime we have reacted in the same way by saying, "this is not my problem... If I resolve this, I will have hundred more..." without knowing it, we were under the influence of the logic of selfishness. Jesus' logic, on the contrary, is that of sharing. He wants us, his disciples, to share what we have with those who have nothing. And that is

not socialism, but rather solidarity. Once the disciples entered Jesus' logic, the little food they had was multiplied by the thousands, to their astonishment.

What do we learn from this text? First, we learn that our God is a God of the impossible. What is humanly speaking impossible, God can make it possible.

Second, we learn that there is reciprocity of action between Jesus and the disciples. The disciples give the bread and the fish to Jesus; Jesus multiplies them and gives them back to the disciples, who in turn give to the crowd.

As we can see in the text, the disciples are helpless without the Lord, but it is also true that the Lord is helpless without the disciples. Concretely, it means that Jesus needs people through whom he can speak and act and touch the lives of many. He needs men and women to whom he can give so that, in turn, they can give to others. Without such men and women, he cannot get things done for the glory of his Father and the salvation of the world. Jesus needs you and me. Let us not refuse to cooperate.

Third, we learn that little is always much in the hands of our God. In fact, in order to perform the miracle, Jesus multiplied the bread and fish, not from what he invented, but from what he received from the disciples. The point here is that what we give, as little as it might be, God can always make it big. But how many people have been ashamed of giving because it was too small or too little? I believe that what counts is not the quantity of what we give, but the heart that gives.

Because God gives abundantly, what shall be our attitude? Our attitude in abundance should always be: no waste. In fact, God gives to us with generosity, but a wasteful extravagance is never right. Therefore, God's generous giving requires our wise using.

Another thing we learn is the similarity between the multiplication of the bread and the Eucharist. The words with which Matthew describes the multiplication of the bread are exactly what we use for the consecration in the Mass: "[Taking the five loaves and the fish, he said the blessing, broke them and gave them to the disciples...](#)" The point of Matthew in doing so is to tell us that the Eucharist is the sacrament of sharing par excellence. Because we share at the table of the Lord Jesus, we must be open to sharing our material bread with our fellows in need. That is the challenge this Gospel sets before us today.

Now let me finish by raising a question: we might not be well off; we might be sick or hungry; but in spite of all that, can we still keep believing in Jesus? With St Paul, let us have the courage to say that nothing in this world will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us ask the grace to endure everything with Christ so that we come to share in his glory. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 55, 1-3; Romans 8, 35, 37-39; Matthew 14, 13-21



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