

Meditations: Friday of the Second Week of Easter

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Easter season.

- Jesus multiplies the loaves
- The needs of others do not go unnoticed by a Christian
- The Church draws her life from the Eucharist

THE GOSPEL of Saint John relates seven miracles of our Lord, among which is the first multiplication of the loaves and fishes. This gospel

passage prefigures the Passover of our Lord and the institution of the Eucharist. A great multitude had gathered near the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, attracted by the Teacher whose fame had spread because of his miracles and teachings. From the top of the hillside, our Lord sees the large crowd and, turning to Philip, the person nearest to Him, asks a surprising question: *How are we going to find bread, so that these people may eat?* (Jn 6:5). Philip's first thought may have been that the Master didn't expect a serious reply. But realizing that he often failed to understand what Jesus was trying to say, he prudently limited himself to giving a rough estimate: *Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little* (Jn 6:7). Then Andrew, who seemed to be more aware of the situation, answered: *There's a lad here who has five barley loaves and*

two fish; but what are they among so many? (Jn 6:9).

Saint John points out that, even though Jesus asked the apostles for their advice, *he himself knew what he would do (Jn 6:6)*. The sacred writer stresses that it was humanly impossible to feed such a large crowd. And he does so not only to highlight the greatness of the miracle, but above all to stress that salvation is a gift that comes from God; it is not the result of human effort, even though our Lord wants to count on us to help bring it about. “Often, throughout the history of the Work,” Saint Josemaría said, “I have reflected on the fact that God has thought things out from all eternity, and yet He leaves us completely free. Sometimes it seems that our Lord is testing us, that He wants to put our faith to the trial. But Christ never leaves us. If we stand our ground, He

is ready to work miracles and multiply the loaves.”^[1]

JESUS SAID, ‘Get the people to sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also with the fish, as much as they wanted (Jn 6:10-11). The Gospel doesn’t describe how Jesus materially worked this miracle. But what we can sense is how this experience would have strengthened their faith. Later, in the light of the resurrection, they would have understood it more fully. Our Lord expected them – as He does each one of us – to contribute what they could on their part. He too would continue contributing his “part.” God’s action does not always show itself completely and we fail to discover everyone it really involves and all of its consequences.

Nevertheless, it continues being the most real and important part. With our human action alongside God's action, the apostolic mission will go forward and the Church will continue to be built up.

But there was yet another teaching that our Lord communicated with the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: a lesson in charity. He showed them how a Christian has to be attentive to and care for the spiritual and material needs of others. First, with a look that can perceive these needs, with a compassionate look and a desire to truly care for the others. And then, with a generosity shown in deeds. It isn't sufficient to think how nice it would be to do something but that sadly one can do nothing. Good intentions are not enough if in the end they don't lead anywhere. Jesus wants each person to do what he or she can to help specific people in difficult situations.

He enlists his disciples to look for solutions even if that is only a beginning, to try to get a positive process underway. In short, to complicate their lives, if necessary, to put themselves out to help others.

“To do so, we need our Lord to enlarge our heart, to give us a heart to the measure of his, so that all the needs, sorrows and sufferings of the men and women of our time, especially the weakest, can find room there. In today’s world, poverty presents many faces: sick and elderly people treated with indifference, the loneliness felt by many abandoned people, the trauma of refugees, and the destitution in which a large part of humanity lives, often as a consequence of injustices that cry out to heaven. None of these things can leave us indifferent. Every Christian has to put into action the ‘creativity of charity’ that Saint John Paul II spoke about, in order to bring the

balm of God's tenderness to all our brothers and sisters in need."^[2]

JESUS THEN TOOK THE LOAVES, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them (Jn 6:11). These words of John foreshadow the institution of the Eucharist. In this same chapter of the fourth Gospel we find the discourse on the bread of life, in which Jesus promises to give Himself as food for our souls.

In the Eucharist, something small and material, a little bread and wine, becomes supernatural nourishment; it becomes the Body and Blood of Christ, the Bread of Angels, new Manna which restores the strength of God's People, the Church. "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist."^[3] "The Christian community is born and reborn continually from this Eucharistic Communion. Living communion with Christ is therefore anything but

being passive and detached from daily life. On the contrary, it includes us ever more and more in the relationship with the men and the women of our time, in order to offer them the concrete sign of Christ's mercy and concern ... Jesus sees the crowd, feels compassion for them and multiplies the loaves; and He does the same in the Eucharist. We believers who receive this Eucharistic Bread are spurred by Jesus to take this service to others, with his same compassion.”^[4]

“The Eucharist can never be just a liturgical action,” Benedict XVI said in a homily. “It is complete only if the liturgical *agape* then becomes love in daily life. In Christian worship, the two things become one – experiencing the Lord's love in the act of worship and fostering love for one's neighbour. We ask the Lord for the grace to learn to live the mystery of the Eucharist ever more deeply, in

such a way that the transformation of the world can begin to take place.”^[5] Let us also ask Mary, “present with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist”^[6] to help us spread throughout the world the sanctifying power of the Sacrifice of the Altar.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 1 April 1962.

^[2] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, *In the Light of the Gospel*, Kindle edition, no. 82, p. 91.

^[3] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 1.

^[4] Francis, General Audience, 17 August 2016.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Homily, 9 April 2009.

^[6] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 57.

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