

Meditations: Monday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 18th week of Ordinary Time.

- Seeking what is humanly possible
- Memory of a gift
- Living by faith

THE PEOPLE have been listening to Jesus' teachings for several hours now. A feeling of anxiety begins to spread among the disciples. What will happen when those people realize they won't have time to provide themselves with food? Perhaps their enthusiasm will turn to discouragement, or their fatigue will make them forget what they have heard. So they approach Jesus discreetly and warn Him: "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves" (*Mt 14:15*). Even though the apostles' advice is reasonable, our Lord's answer is not easy to understand: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (*Mt 14:16*).

The apostles had not come to Jesus to escape from their own responsibility. They were not trying to get rid of a difficulty for themselves. In fact, they

were anticipating a problem and wanted to help solve it. But feeding all those people was simply a task beyond their capabilities; in fact, they had not even considered it an option, since they had no provisions for such a large crowd. Of course, they felt sorry for those people. But what else could they do? But the Master refused to give in. He wanted his disciples to do everything humanly possible to feed those who had come to listen to Him.

So they did what they could, even though their efforts didn't seem to bear much fruit; they only managed to obtain five loaves and two fish. But Jesus, appreciating their effort, took what they had, "looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds" (Mt 14:19). There was enough food for everyone, and so much was left over that twelve

baskets were needed to collect it. “The miracle was not worked from nothing, but from a first modest sharing of what a simple lad had brought with him. Jesus does not ask us for what we do not have. Rather, he makes us see that if each person offers the little he has the miracle can always be repeated: God is capable of multiplying our small acts of love and making us share in his gift.”^[1]

WE CAN IMAGINE the multiplication of the loaves and fish taking place slowly. The apostles began to distribute the food, and little by little they realized a miracle was taking place. Even if what they had obtained was so little, each time they went back for more food there was enough for a few more people. The manna the people of Israel gathered

in the desert was also impossible to accumulate or store up (cf. *Ex 16:17-20*). God wanted those who received that food to never forget that it was a divine gift. He wanted them to trust in him, rather than seeking only human security. Perhaps our Lord wanted the apostles to have a similar experience. “Jesus demonstrates his power, not in a spectacular way but as a sign of charity, of God the Father’s generosity towards his weary and needy children.”^[2]

Months later, our Lord would ask the apostles to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. Once again they might feel small before such a great mission: who were they for such an immense undertaking? They would then recall what they had experienced on the day of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Our Lord could have fed that multitude without any help. But He

wanted the apostles to do their part, to share with God in his mission. And although the means were scarce, they ended up being sufficient. St. Josemaría recommended that, rather than focusing too much on our own strength, “each of us should meditate on what God has done for us.”^[3] The determining factor is not what we see ourselves capable of doing, but what our Lord does through us. Jesus doesn’t want our limitations to set the pace of evangelization, but rather the needs of souls and the strength of the Holy Spirit that multiplies our efforts.

THE FAITH with which our Lord expects us to act does not consist in the certainty that our qualities will multiply. It is rather a question of putting our five loaves at the service of God, acting as if those loaves were

enough, even if in doing so we continue to experience our own limitations. Faith is not a feeling that ignores difficulties and naively trusts that things will go well. It is rather the certainty that, whatever happens, if we let the Holy Spirit work, God will always be at our side and use the difficulties for our benefit, for the benefit of those around us and of the entire Church.

Our Lord has entrusted a great mission to the Church and to every Christian. It is not strange that at some point we may feel overwhelmed. The episode of the multiplication of the loaves will make us aware again that God expects us, like the disciples, to involve ourselves in the apostolic mission with all our abilities. And he also expects us to begin to do what we can without letting ourselves be dominated by the concern of whether or not we will succeed in

meeting expectations. The scarcity of our loaves and fish should not prevent us from doing what is in our hands at each moment. God will provide for what comes next. Thus, even if we do not feel secure, we will, in fact, be living by faith.

“Christian optimism is not a sugary optimism; nor is it a mere human confidence that everything will turn out all right. It is an optimism that sinks its roots in an awareness of our freedom, and in the sure knowledge of the power of grace. It is an optimism which leads us to make demands on ourselves, to struggle to respond at every moment to God’s calls.”^[4] Mary always accepted with faith everything that happened in her life, even what seemed most disconcerting. She knew that being the mother of God would go beyond her own capacities, but she trusted in Him. And that courage led Mary to become the mother of all mankind.

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 29 July 2012.

^[2] Francis, Angelus, 2 August 2020.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 312.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 659.

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