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Meditations: Saturday of the Fifth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the 5th Week in Ordinary Time. The topics are: Jesus looks upon the people with mercy; God counts on us to carry out his miracles; offering our ordinary lives to God.

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- Jesus looks upon the people with mercy
 - God counts on us to carry out his miracles
 - Offering our ordinary lives to God
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WHEN JESUS looked out at the crowd following Him, He said, *I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat* (Mk 8:2). This is the second multiplication of loaves and fishes recounted by the evangelist St. Mark, and this time, Jesus feeds four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fish (cf. Mk 8:1-10). This miracle was not a response to an explicit request from

the people; rather, Jesus looked at them, discovered that they needed something, and chose to offer a remedy. *Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them (Ps 107:5)*, says the psalmist, but God, in his sovereign freedom, responds through the prophet, saying, *I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish (Jer 31:25)*. When the evangelist tells us that Jesus *had compassion* on the hungry crowd, we catch a glimpse, as through a small crack, of the Trinitarian love that gave rise to the Incarnation of the Word.

“The event of the Incarnation, of God who became man, like us, shows us the daring realism of divine love. God’s action, in fact was not limited to words. On the contrary we might say that he was not content with speaking, but entered into our history, taking upon himself the effort and burden of human life. [...]

The way God acted gives us a strong incentive to question ourselves on the reality of our faith, which must not be limited to the sphere of sentiment, of the emotions; rather, it must enter into the practicality of our existence, that is, it must touch our everyday life and give it practical guidance.”^[1] — God’s love is real, and He wants to feed his children. Jesus looked at the people following Him with mercy. That mercy moved Him to work the miracle of the multiplication of loaves, and He looks at us with the same merciful gaze today.

WHEN JESUS announces his desire to feed the multitude, the apostles place an obviously insufficient contribution before Him: a few loaves and some fish. From a human perspective, the task was impossible;

the only solution was to send the crowd away and have each family find its own food. But the other option is to jump into the adventure with Jesus. He could have worked the miracle without any help, but He expected something from his apostles, a small sign that they did not want to send the people away. Christ reasons like a person in love: the goal is not to get things done, but to do them together. God does extraordinary things with our ordinary contributions.

St. Josemaría liked to tell the story of seeing some fisherman allowing a little boy to “help” as they pulled a huge net of fish from the water: “The tough, unsophisticated fishermen must have felt their hearts soften, for they allowed the child to join in, without chasing him away, even though he was more of a hindrance than a help. I thought of you and of myself. Of you, whom I did not know

as yet, and of myself; of our daily tugging away at the rope, and of many things. If we come before God our Lord like that child, convinced of our weakness yet ever prepared to second his plans, we shall more easily reach our goal. We shall haul the net onto the shore, bursting with an abundant catch, for the power of God reaches where our strength cannot.”^[2] —

Then we find that God’s works are also ours, because He wants to involve us in carrying them out. We live at a particular time, in a specific place, with certain people. Christ wants us to participate in his desire to feed the hungry crowd that longs for the full happiness that the Son of God brings to the world.

REMEMBERING THE miracle of the multiplication of the loaves can help us understand the lives of the saints. They were people like us, of flesh and blood, who had flaws, made mistakes, and experienced limitations. Most of them, initially, had no particular influence on society's decisions or on the people around them. But their personal encounter with Christ led them to realize that their task was to offer the "loaves and fishes" at their disposal; afterwards, the Lord would take care of feeding the crowd.

The saints remind us that we change the world through "small everyday things: with generosity, sharing, creating these attitudes of fraternity."^[3] There are numerous examples, such as the Curé of Ars or Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who stayed in one place nearly all their lives but made a deep impact on many souls. Similarly, we, ordinary Christians in

the midst of the world, can collaborate in this multiplication of food by living according to this deep conviction of St. Josemaría: “Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and concentrate on what you are doing.”^[4] —

Our Mother Mary is the best example of a person who knew how to put everything she had at God’s service. It doesn’t matter if there are few or many loaves; what matters is placing whatever we have at Jesus’s feet. In this way, we will bear witness to the wonders of a Father who longs to satisfy all his children’s hunger.

^[1] — Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 9-I-2013.

^[2] — St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 14.

^[3] Pope Francis, Address, 2-VI-2017.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 815.

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