

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**A REFLECTION
BY POPE FRANCIS**

Today we wish to reflect upon the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. At the beginning of the narrative given by Matthew, Jesus has just received word of the death of John the Baptist, and he crosses the lake by boat in search of a "lonely place apart". The people understand, however, and precede him on foot and thus, "as he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick". That's how Jesus is: always compassionate, always thinking of others. The determination of the people — who fear being left alone, as if abandoned — is striking. John the Baptist, the charismatic prophet, is dead; [the crowd] trusts in Jesus, about whom John had said: "he who is coming after me is mightier than I" (Mt 3:11). Thus, the crowd follows him everywhere, to listen to him and to bring him the sick. And seeing this, Jesus is moved. Jesus is not cold, he does not have a cold heart. Jesus is capable of being moved. On the one hand, he feels a bond with this crowd and does not want them to leave; on the other, he needs a moment of solitude, of prayer, with the Father. Often he spends the night praying to his Father.

Thus, that day too, the Master attends to the people. His compassion is not a vague

sentiment; instead he shows all the strength of his will to be close to us and to save us. Jesus loves us so much and wants to be close to us.

As evening falls, Jesus is concerned about feeding all those tired and hungry people, and looks after those who follow him. He wants his disciples to be involved in this. Indeed he says to them: "you give them something to eat". He shows them that the few loaves and fish that they have, by the power of faith and of prayer, can be shared with all of those people. Jesus works a miracle, but it is the miracle of faith, of prayer, created by compassion and love. Thus, Jesus "broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds". The Lord meets the needs of mankind, but wants to render each one of us a concrete participant in his compassion.

Now let us pause on this, Jesus' gesture of blessing: "taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves". As you see, they are the same signs that Jesus performed at the Last Supper; and they are also the same gestures that each priest performs when he celebrates the Holy Eucharist. 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 more and more in the relationship with the men and women of our time, in order to offer them the concrete sign of mercy and of the attention of Christ. While we are nourished by Christ, the Eucharist which we celebrate transforms us too, step by step, into the Body of Christ and spiritual food for our brothers and sisters. Jesus wants to reach everyone, in order to bring God's love to all. For this reason he makes every believer a servant of mercy. Jesus sees the crowd, feels compassion for them and multiplies the loaves; thus he does the same with the Eucharist. We believers who receive this Eucharistic bread are spurred by Jesus to take this service to others, with his same compassion. This is the way.

The narrative of the multiplication of the loaves and fish ends with the verification that everyone is satisfied and with the collection of the leftover pieces.

When Jesus, with his compassion and his love, gives us a grace, forgives us our sins, embraces us, loves us; he does nothing halfway but completely. As it happens here: all are satisfied. Jesus fills our heart and

our life with his love, with his forgiveness, with his compassion. Thus, Jesus allows his disciples to carry out his command. In this way they know the path to follow: to feed the people and keep them united; that is, to be at the service of life and of communion. Therefore, let us invoke the Lord, that he always make his Church capable of this holy service, and that each one of us may be an instrument of communion in our own family, at work, in the parish and the groups we belong to, a visible sign of the mercy of God who does not want to leave anyone in loneliness and in need, so that communion and peace may descend among mankind and the communion of mankind with God, because this communion is life for all.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus often withdrew to a lonely place to pray and be with God. Do you have a routine for quiet personal prayer? How do you pray?
- When Jesus instructed the disciples to feed the crowds, they responded that they didn't have nearly enough to feed so many people. Have you ever felt inadequate to deal with situations in your life? What did you do? Have you ever asked God to help you? How did he respond?

PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.