

GOSPEL
Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 'Bring them here to me,' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining, twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

A REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT XVI
31 July 2011, Excerpt

This Sunday's Gospel describes the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves that Jesus worked for a great throng of people who had followed him to listen to him and to be healed of various illnesses (cf. Mt 14:14).

As evening fell the disciples suggested to Jesus that he send the crowds away so that they might take some refreshment. But the Lord had something else in mind: "You give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16). However they had "only five loaves... and two fish". Jesus' subsequent action evokes the sacrament of the Eucharist: "He 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).

The miracle consists in the brotherly sharing of a few loaves which, entrusted to the power of God, not only sufficed for everyone but enough was left over to fill 12 baskets. The Lord asked this of the disciples so that it would be they who distributed the bread to the multitude; in this way he taught and prepared them

for their future apostolic mission: in fact, they were to bring to all the nourishment of the Word of life and of the sacraments.

In this miraculous sign the incarnation of God and the work of redemption are interwoven. Jesus, in fact, "went ashore" from the boat to meet the men and women (cf. Mt 14:14). St Maximus the Confessor said that the Word of God made himself present for our sake, by taking flesh, derived from us and conformed to us in all things save sin, in order to expose us to his teaching with words and examples suitable for us" (Ambigua 33: PG 91, 1285 C).

Here the Lord offers us an eloquent example of his compassion for people ... Christ is attentive to material needs but he wished to give more, because man always "hungers for more, he needs more" (Jesus of Nazareth, Doubleday, New York 2007, p. 267 (English translation). God's love is present in the bread of Christ; in the encounter with him "we feed on the living God himself, so to speak, we truly eat the 'bread from Heaven'" (ibid. p. 268).

Dear friends. "in the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 88).

Let us entrust our prayers to the Virgin Mary, so that she may open our hearts to compassion for our neighbour and to fraternal sharing.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: When the disciples see only five loaves and two fish, Jesus tells them to feed the crowd anyway. What does this reveal about the difference between how the disciples see the situation and how Jesus sees it?



Heart: Pope Benedict says that people hunger for more than material needs can satisfy. What kind of hunger do you see in your own life or in the lives of people around you?



Hands: Jesus asks the disciples to offer what little they have and place it in his hands. What is one gift, resource, or opportunity you can offer to God this week for the sake of others?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.