

GOSPEL
John 6:1-15

Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – or of Tiberias – and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover.

Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, ‘Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?’ He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, ‘Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, ‘There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Make the people sit down.’ There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, ‘Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted.’ So they picked them up, and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given, said, ‘This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II
25 July 1982, Translated from Spanish, Excerpt

"Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and distributed it to the guests" (John 6:11). The evangelical scene of the multiplication of the loaves has a particularly significant precedent in the Old Testament, referred to in the first Reading of today's liturgy: even then the few loaves of barley and wheat, offered as first fruits to the prophet Elisha, were enough to alleviate hunger for a hundred people and, after the meal was over, they were overflowing. It did not happen differently in the Gospel just heard, since the crowd — in this case there were several thousand people — ate to their

satiety and were still able to fill no less than twelve baskets with the leftover remains.

Abundance therefore; possibility offered to everyone to eat as much as they wanted. Here is the essential message of today's Liturgy. It echoes a characteristic announcement of the prophets, who had spoken of the times of the Messiah as a period of great abundance: "The poor will eat and be satisfied", it was said in Psalm 21 (v. 27). And the prophet Isaiah, in turn, had predicted: "The Lord of hosts will prepare for all the peoples, on this mountain, a feast of succulent delicacies, a feast of old wines, of fat and tender meats" (25, 6).

This is the message. We collect it in our hearts and reflect on it with an attitude of faith. We know that the full realization of this prophetic prediction will only occur when the eschatological period is completed, which the coming of Christ to earth only inaugurated. When Christ returns in glory to solemnly conclude the history of the world, then finally humanity will reach that abundance of all good, in which all the expectations of the "poor" will find satisfaction.

"Full satiety" is therefore a goal towards which today's humanity, humanity of the Messianic era, is still on its way. This does not prevent, however, that something of that fullness must already be experienced in the present time . The eschatological time, in fact, has already begun, although, as I said, it is not yet fully realized .

The consequence of this is evident: it is the duty of Christians, the "sons of the Kingdom" (Mt 13:38), to commit themselves with generous concern so that now, whoever lacks the goods necessary for life, can reach as quickly as possible to possess them, so that he can satisfy himself and the members of his own family.

The Church, today as always, has the congenital vocation of placing itself at the service of the poor, to continue to be, even in the contemporary world, a "sign" for all those who, in hunger for the bread of the land, have in their hearts the aspiration to eternal goods.

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Yes, also the aspiration for eternal goods. In fact, "man does not live by bread alone", it is said in the Gospel (cf. Mt 4:4). Development and well-being are not enough to satisfy the expectations of our hearts. Man's needs go beyond the purely temporal scope and reach the eternal.

It was therefore not by chance that the evangelist John made the narrative of the multiplication of the loaves a "sign", an image anticipating the Eucharist: the terms he uses ("he took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them") find exact correspondence in narration of the Supper. From the miracle that occurred on the slope of the Galilee mountain, we are led to reflect on the magnificent banquet that Jesus prepares on the altar table for us, pilgrims on the path of the world's roads.

The bread, which is offered here, is the body of Christ and the wine is His blood: "food" that can satisfy our hearts for eternity. "Food", however, that commits us already during the time of our life here below: "He who eats of Me will live for Me", said Jesus (John 6, 57). "Living for Jesus" means fulfilling His commandments and, in particular, the "greatest commandment", that of love. How could anyone not love Christ and, in Him, the brothers and sisters who live in the world, who, sitting at the same table with them, consumes the same divine food?

How timely, then, are the exhortations given to us by Saint Paul in the second Reading of today's Mass! He recommended that we act "with all humility,

gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in charity, striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the peace that holds us all together" (Eph 4:2 s .).

A Christian discredits himself if he does not know how to be a man of unity and peace. Here reflection necessarily becomes personal and intimate: each person must question themselves, submitting their own life (family, work and society) to the judgment of the Word of God, to see how far it is in tune with the demands that arise from the vocation to unity in love.

The sector of thoughts and feelings, words and judgments, attitudes and concrete initiatives is called into question.

Let us let ourselves be guided by Christ in this salutary "life review". It will sometimes be a particularly uncomfortable experience, in which certain mental and operational habits that we thought we had acquired may be called into question. But it will be a "liberating" experience, thanks to which we will be able to discover new possibilities for overcoming our selfishness and meeting others, which is like saying new possibilities for joy. Didn't Jesus, in fact, say that "there is more joy in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35)? Why, in this case, not try taking Him at His word?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: St John Paul II reminds us that a person's needs "go beyond the purely temporal scope and reach the eternal". What does this mean to you?



Heart: We are to act "with all humility, gentleness and patience". Do you find this difficult? What is difficult in acting in this way?



Hands: How might we better reach out to the "poor" in our parish and broader community?

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'.