

Monday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mt 14:13-21): When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, “This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.” He said to them, “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” But they said to him, “Five loaves and two fish are all we have here.”

Then he said, “Bring them here to me,” and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over— twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

“Looking up to heaven”

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Today, the Gospel touches our “mental pockets” ... This is why, as in Jesus' time, the voices of the prudent may appear to weigh whether such a matter is worthwhile. The disciples, seeing that it was getting late and that they did not know how to attend to the crowd gathered around Jesus, found a graceful way out: “... they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves” (Mt 14:15). Little did they expect that their Master and Lord would break this prudent reasoning, saying: “give them some food yourselves” (Mt 14:16).

A popular saying goes: “Whoever leaves God out of his calculations does not know how to count.” And it is true, neither the disciples nor us know how to count, because we often forget the most important sum: God himself among us.

The disciples did the math correctly; they accurately counted the number of loaves and fishes, but when they mentally divided them among so many people, they ended up with almost a recurring zero. That's why they opted for prudent realism: "Five loaves and two fish are all we have here" (Mt 14:17). They don't realize that they have Jesus—true God and true man—among them!

Paraphrasing Saint Josemaría, it would do us good to remember: "In your apostolic undertakings you are right — it's your duty — to consider what means the world can offer you ($2+2=4$), but don't forget — ever! — that, fortunately, your calculations must include another term: $God+2+2...$ " Christian optimism is not based on the absence of difficulties, resistance, and personal errors, but on God who tells us: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

It would be good for you and me, when faced with difficulties, before condemning the boldness and optimism of the Christian spirit, to count on God. May we be able to say with Saint Francis that brilliant prayer: "Where there is hatred, let me sow love"; that is, where the numbers don't add up, let us count on God.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "We may not be able to give much but we can always give the joy that springs from a heart that is in love with God." (Saint Teresa of Calcutta)
- "Those few loaves and fish, shared and blessed by God, were enough for everyone. And pay heed! It isn't magic, it's a "sign": a sign that calls for faith in God, provident Father." (Francis)
- "Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicant's union with the Lord, forgives his venial sins, and preserves him from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1,416)