

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of spiritual nourishment. They show us that God provides for those who are hungry and quenches the thirst of those who are thirsty. They invite us to long for the food that comes from the Son of God.

The first reading recalls the prophecy of Isaiah that describes the generosity of God who feeds the needy and gives water to the thirsty. It portrays in particular the invitation God launched to his people to come to him and receive food for free and without spending money. It also expresses God's intention to renew his covenant with them and his desire that they listen to him so that they may have life in abundance.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the source of all the good things people enjoy in the world. Another idea is that because of their obedience, God provides for the needs of those who listen to him. The last idea is a warning against the human craziness of spending money on things that do not profit human wellbeing.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it relates the miracle of the multiplication of the bread. First of all, the Gospel says that, once Jesus learned about the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place.

The crowds, on their part, having heard of it, followed him on foot from all the surrounding towns. At the sight of the crowds at his disembarkment, his heart was moved with pity for them and he cured their sick.

When evening came, his disciples suggested him to send off the crowds so that they go to the villages and buy food for themselves. In reaction, Jesus refused and asked that they themselves give them food to eat.

But, the disciples alleged that they did not have enough food except five loaves and two fish. Against all expectation, Jesus ordered the crowds to sit on the grass. Then, he took the five loaves and the two fish; he blessed them, broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples who, in turn, gave them to the crowds. Everybody of those present, almost five thousand people without counting women and children, ate and was satisfied. In the end, the disciples collected twelve wicker baskets of left over.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the Christian duty of caring for one another. Let me start this way. One of the constants that define us as human beings is the spirit of prevision. The spirit of prevision leads us to make plans instead of doing things at random, to prepare instead of improvising, to project ourselves in the future instead of being surprised by the events, to estimate in advance the outcome of what we do instead of being overwhelmed by the cost, etc.

In many ways, the spirit of prevision is beneficial because it eliminates the risk of failure. However, that spirit can be so meticulous that it leads to the logic of selfishness; because if everything is planned, it is by taking into account ones needs and those of the group to whom someone belongs. If then, by any chance, there is a supplementary need that was not counted in the first plan, the prevision runs the risk of being in trouble.

That is exactly what happened to the disciples. They have prepared five loaves and two fish for themselves. But, now that they have to face five thousand people, they do not know what to do. Humanly speaking, it is impossible to feed them unless they find

themselves food in the surrounding villages. For Jesus, on the contrary, they have to feed them.

But how is it possible? For Jesus, indeed, this is possible only if they get out of the logic of selfishness and enter the logic of providence. The logic of selfishness that is generated by the spirit of prevision is based on human calculation only; the providence, on the contrary, is based on God's generosity that goes beyond human calculation.

There is no denial of the importance of the spirit of prevision. But left alone, it is not enough; it should be compensated by God's providence. To count only on the spirit of prevision would like to say, in other words, that man is his own master and the success of his endeavors depends on him alone. As long as we are locked in that logic, failure is always possible, because it is true that we cannot control the random factor.

Without denying the spirit of prevision, when we count also on God's providence, the success is possible. In fact, once the disciples could count on God's providence, they could feed five thousand people and have some left over. Once they entered Jesus' logic, the little food they had was multiplied a thousand times to their astonishment.

Moreover, the spirit of prevision creates the fear of giving to others, because what we possess is not enough for everybody. But, when we act pushed by the spirit of providence, even the least we give, God can multiply it and make it big. That is what happened to the disciples when Jesus multiplied the same loaves and fish they had from the beginning. That is why we have to understand that what we give, as little as it might be, God can always make it big. For that reason, we should not be ashamed of giving because it is too small or too little. After all, what counts is not the quantity of what we give, but the heart that gives. That is true also for our offerings in the Church.

The point of Jesus, indeed, is that we care for one another by sharing what we have with those who have nothing. This has nothing to do with socialism, but with Christian charity that impels us to do to others what we would like to be done to us and which recognizes the presence of Jesus in the needy and the marginalized. This has nothing to do with socialism, but rather with Christian solidarity that recognizes that, if God has blessed us, it is so that we become a blessing to others.

Finally, it is the logic of the providence that is at the heart of the Eucharist. In fact, in the Eucharist, God feeds us with the bread of life, beyond any calculation. In that sense, the multiplication of the bread is the symbol of the Eucharist. As the bread feeds the body, the Eucharist feeds our souls. That is why the words with which Matthew describes the multiplication of the bread recall those used for the consecration in the Mass: "Taking the five loaves and the fish, he said the blessing, broke them and gave them to the disciples..." In that sense, the Eucharist is the sacrament of sharing par excellence. It is an invitation to share our material bread with our fellows in need and to care for one another. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 55: 1-3; Romans 8: 35, 37-39; Matthew 14: 13-21



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