



40th European Meeting of Young Adults

Celebration in spite of death

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

(Matthew 14:13-21)

Meditation for October (No. 2)

Jesus has just learned about the murder of his cousin John the Baptist. He must feel deeply affected, and he pulls away from the crowd. Even so, he accepts to be moved in his grief by people who come to him asking to be healed. He consents, offers healing, and lets the forces of life take precedent over his sadness.

This passage from death to life seems to be celebrated at an exceptional time. In a deserted place, they find grass where they can lay and eat bread and fish given freely and in abundance. It is a humble sign, not a grand meal, but because it serves at least 10 to 15,000 people, it is very impressive, to the point that the story is told two times in certain Gospels.

In the middle of grief, sickness, infirmity, as well as threats he foresees for his life, Jesus stops time for a moment. He keeps the crowds with him, as if to allow them to live a different experience, one that comes from another world, where time no longer exists and where death doesn't cloud the horizon.

This looks like a utopia, like a far-off place that wouldn't happen naturally, like a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even so, the story is told in a very real way. On this earth, with these materials, God allows space within the rules of his creation. It is this liberty, deliberately taken by God, that we call a miracle.

When we talk about miracles we also talk about lessons. What message did Jesus want to give us, in this dark moment of his existence? The message truly sounds like one of encouragement. Jesus encourages us to trust in God's generosity, which is stronger even than death and destruction. This healing and this celebration in the desert are an illustration of the very gesture of prayer: entrust to God that which we have and that of which we don't have enough, our strengths, the fruit of our labors, and also our struggles.

God accepts every part of us: our sickness and infirmity, our bread and our fish. He takes on our strengths and our weaknesses. And from little, God makes more, because it is shared. Our talents brought together by the Holy Spirit multiply each other more than they add to each other. This is why, surely, Brother Roger insisted his whole life on the importance of 'beginning with the little we have.' Our responsibility to ourselves is to begin. God, by his grace and with our perseverance, will do the rest. Do not be afraid of not having enough to get started. Here also is encouragement.

In this version of the multiplication of the loaves, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus only gives bread to the crowds, without the fish, meaning he keeps a part of what we give him. What can this new detail signify? Fish, as dead animals, represent that which is destroyed in us, that which no longer gives us life. With this interpretation, the gesture of Jesus becomes very revealing. God filters that which we give him. That which will bear fruit, he gives back to us so that we can share and enjoy it with many people. But what hurts us or shames us, he keeps for himself.

Questions for sharing in small groups

- ▶ Have I received something special from God?
If so, what can I do with it to benefit the most people and not keep this gift only for myself?
- ▶ In what I have given to God, what would I like him to keep for himself?
From what would I like God to liberate me?
- ▶ Of what kind of society does this multiplication of loaves paint a picture?