

LENT 2023

«Give them
some food yourselves»

(Mt 14,16)

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Reflections for Lent

2/2023

SECOND MEETING

Experiential encounter

This meeting wants to be more experiential: it expects that in the first a decision has been made to consider and to help some poor person. In this second meeting we are called to invite the poor and share with them a moment of prayer and a fraternal agape (e.g. some snack or coffee/tea or lunch...) to facilitate the sharing of life experience

and also have the opportunity to listen to their experience. The purpose of this meeting is not simply to organize a moment to give something to eat to the poor but to “give ourselves to eat” that is: open our hearts to their presence, take a quiet time to be with them, listen to what they carry in their hearts in conversations at the table or through a moment of sharing in front of everyone, then present

all to God and let ourselves be enlightened by Him through a moment of prayer.

Clearly, the meeting must be organised in such a way as to facilitate their active participation. So it is left complete freedom to build the structure of the gathering so that every community can adapt the encounter to his reality and to the situation of the poor.

We limit ourselves to indicating a passage from the Gospel with guidelines and questions that can facilitate the sharing. We are invited, at first, to meditate on it on a personal level, to accept God's invitation to open our hearts to the poor and then, at a later time, to implement the indications received in prayer by preparing the meeting of sharing with the poor inspired by the example of Jesus transmitted in this passage.

Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 14:13-21 (Bread for all)

When Jesus heard of it, 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."

[Jesus] 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.



Presentation of the Gospel passage

The story of the sharing of loaves and fish, common to all four gospels, echoes some episodes of the Old Testament, especially the gift of manna in the desert (Ex 16; Nm 11:31-32) and anticipates in some way the definitive and total gift of Jesus at the Last Supper. This gesture is a sign of God's solidarity with us and also of the solidarity of men among themselves.

Jesus retires to a deserted place immediately after the news of the death of John the Baptist. He needs to be alone to process the loss, to pray. It is in this context that people come to him from various cities. The death of the Baptist left a sense of emptiness in the heart of Jesus but also in the heart of people. Stopping and going to a deserted place allows him to welcome

the emptiness created by the death of the prophet, favours true encounter, deep listening. He did not worry about standing up to Herod, who also began to question himself about him, but focused on his mission, that of being the revelation of God among men, through attention to their needs.

We too need to stop, to withdraw into the background, to welcome the vacuum created in society with so many connections but few encounters, disconnected between us and sometimes within us. There, in this space we realize poverty, loneliness, we realize that others also need true, deep encounters of listening and sharing, they need God. The Lord is able to satiate our hunger, to fill this void, if we listen to his Word and are in a condition of openness towards others.

Some points for our reflection

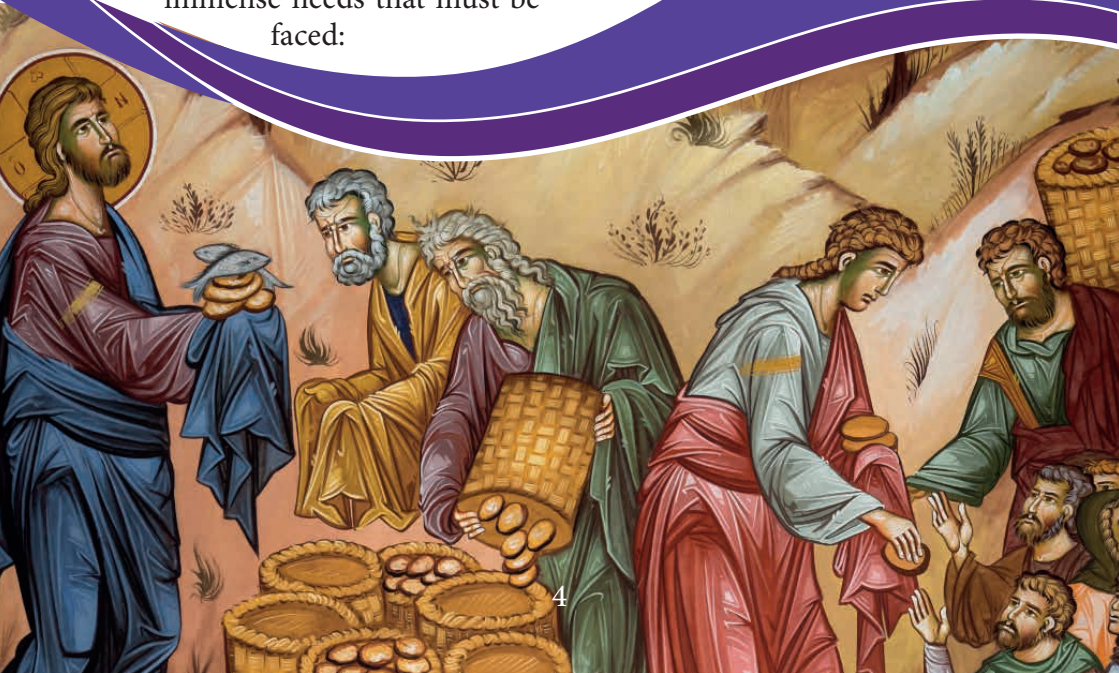
✓ People came for Jesus and remained there for him listening, letting themselves be helped, healed by Jesus without worrying about hunger and the fact that it becomes dark. Instead, the apostles show concern and forget who Jesus is, do not show trust in God, in his Providence.

✓ In front of the crowd and its need, the first emotional reaction of the disciples is: “send them away so everyone can provide for himself”. Logical answer but cold. Like the disciples, we too often point out the disproportion between the insufficiency, the scarcity of the means at our disposal and the immense needs that must be faced:

“We have only five loaves and two fish”: We can do nothing about it. So we suggest that people “may go”.

✓ Jesus looks to people, to their hearts and has compassion on them. But he looks not only at hungry people, he also looks at the apostles and perhaps regrets a little for their coldness and wants to work a miracle also for them, deep down, helping them to open their hearts to the faith without fear of their limitations.

✓ Jesus invites them to take charge of the problem: «They need not go; you yourself give them food». Jesus’ solution seems illogical to human calculation,



but not to that of faith: “Bring them here to me”. The logic of faith is not based on the accuracy of mathematical calculation but on the presence of Jesus and his love.

✓ The rest of the story shows that Jesus does not work magically, does not start from scratch. He needs someone to make available the little he has. The first miracle lies precisely in knowing how to share, in creating communion. A gesture that gives the green light to Jesus, that “little” shared, allows him to feed a multitude. The broken and shared bread is not exhausted, but in Jesus’ hands it is multiplied, filling an endless number of people.

✓ Humanity is accustomed to multiply but this does not solve the problems, indeed people are more hungry, more needy because everyone accumulates for fear of being in need, so people are closed in their wealth. They lack nothing at the material level, but they lack love, the meaning of life, God. In sharing, however, it is indicated that people are satiated, indeed there is also a surplus. Contrary to what mathematics teaches us, through division there is multiplication, there is an increase.

✓ The solution of the problems is found in the conjunction of these

two aspects: the courage of sharing and faith in Jesus. If they had given the loaves to people they would not have been enough; instead they give them to Jesus for the people and Jesus makes them enough and abound. So the two key elements are: Faith and sharing.

✓ So the miracle happens: being grateful to God for that “little” that we seem to have. Sharing frees us from the fear of remaining without, shows that God acts by multiplying the “little”. As the last “fruit” of sharing the little he has, one discovers many true bonds and relationships.

✓ It is not just a question of distributing bread to the hungry crowd, but of “making bread”, of giving oneself: what satisfies is the free gift of self. That means we have to give people, our time, our energies. It is precisely because we give to others that we save ourselves. And it is by giving ourselves to others that we save ourselves. In this passage, Jesus asks us one thing: he wants us all to try to develop the feeling of compassion. All those who receive Jesus in the Eucharist must in turn be able to “make themselves bread”, to give themselves to others.



✓ Sharing is first and foremost a sharing of values, of experiences of faith that give meaning to the material things that are exchanged. I give you something precious for me (money, time, concrete things) and at the same time I receive from you something that perhaps is not material but is just as important: friendship, unity, the possibility of meeting Jesus, reminding us that in these poor people the image of God shines.

✓ In poor countries, there could be a practical problem: if you start feeding poor people, many more people will come knocking at the door, and this will create a great provocation. It is necessary to understand here, in the light of the Word, what it means to share, and what are the best ways to help them, trusting in Providence.

Questions for reflection:

(Some questions concern personal reflection, others are more generic. Each community should choose the most suitable for the meeting.)

- What struck us most in this passage of the Gospel?
- We too have our five loaves and two fish: we believe that it is little, but God does great things... What do I feel now to share with others in my life?
- What do we share with others: the superfluous, what I no longer need, or simply what is really needed in this moment by my neighbour?
- What are the needs of the people around us? What is the deepest lack we encounter?
- Have you ever experienced moments when you felt lost, alone, powerless?
- Am I able to listen to the need of others, to feel compassion and pain for them?
- Am I able to listen, without haste, to welcome the other with his sufferings, without dismissing him immediately, and letting him wander helpless?
- Do I prefer to avoid or run the risk of facing up to a dangerous or difficult situation?
- What is my “little”, that I try to keep for myself, but that Jesus asks me to share?
- I tell of a situation in my life in which, despite the few resources available, I managed to share my goods/skills/abilities, and I saw Providence at work.
- What capacity can I put in place, I can put at the service of others here and now, so that the Lord blesses them and multiplies them for others?
- Did you find someone who helped you in a time of difficulty, someone through whom God came to meet you?
- How did you feel when someone approached you for help: Humiliated or Welcomed? Was hope born again?
- Despite your difficulties, have you experienced moments when you could be close or helpful to someone who was more in need of you? What did you do? And then how did you feel?
- What does love, friendship, solidarity mean to you?
- How do we deal with people's difficulties on our apostolate place?

Do we abandon them to themselves? Do we accuse them of being the reason for their situation?

***At the end of the meeting,
when the community is
alone, one asks:***

- What are the “new poor” or the new poverty knocking at the door of our community? It is possible in this Lent starting from the concreteness of the encounter with the poor and from placing ourselves as a community (and Orionine family) in dialogue with the territory (institutions, Caritas, other religious...) identify a new charitable bud or otherwise start a process to get to respond to a local situation of poverty?

Piccola Opera della Divina Provvidenza
Via Etruria 6, 00183 Roma
Tel. +39 06 7726781 - www.donorione.org