

August 3, 2014 – 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Prepared by Fr. Dan McLaughlin, MM, Brazil

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalms 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

In today's reading from Isaiah, God speaks to His people through the prophet saying, "Be attentive to me, come to me, listen to me that you will live. I will make a definitive covenant with you, 'I will be faithful in my friendship...'" The prophet invites his people to a new alliance with God which gives human life a higher value and transforms all social relations.

In the gospel of today's liturgy, Jesus shares with us what this covenant with God looks like. In the previous verses, we learn that Herod, governor of Galilee, gave a banquet for all his friends. We can imagine the different foods and drinks offered at this banquet. We can imagine, also, the class of people invited to this banquet.

In contrast, in Matthew's gospel, the crowds who have been accompanying Jesus were poor, sheep herders, carpenters, fishermen, women and children, and continued with him into the desert. It is here that Jesus invited all who accompanied him to sit down, and said to the disciples, "They do not have to go away; it is you who have to give them something to eat." The disciples replied, "We have only five pieces of bread and two fishes." Christ responded, "Bring these here." We all know the results of this event.

One day, while reflecting on this gospel with a group of catechists, one shared with us her understanding of this gospel. She mentioned that like all Brazilians from the poorer areas of the city, when they go to an area for a picnic, or go on a journey, they always bring some food with them. For her, when the disciples said they had only five pieces of bread and two fishes, they were speaking for themselves, but when the others present saw them sharing what they had, each one pulled some pieces of bread from what they had brought to feed themselves to give to Jesus to share with others who may not have enough. They shared. For her, this is the meaning of this gospel story.

Fr. José Bortolini, a Brazilian biblical scholar, reflected on the two banquets related in this gospel of Mathew. The one given by Herod took place in a palatial setting, with guests from society, government, and business. The food and drink were first class and there was entertainment. But this entertainment was the death of John the Baptist. This banquet of Herod was a banquet of death.

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes, according to Fr. Bortolini, is a banquet of life. It is in sharing that there is life. As the catechist reflected on this story from Matthew's gospel, it is in the sharing of the little that one has that gives life.

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