

**I. 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 31, 2011 – Loaves and the Fishes**

**II. There is another banquet other than the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.**

**A. The account of this other banquet is given us just prior to the banquet of the loaves and fishes in the gospel of Matthew.**

**B. To what banquet do I refer?**

**1. Well, it is indicated in the very first line of the passage we read:**

**2. “When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist...”**

**3. The passage which precedes this one is the story of the banquet which Herod held takes place within his luxurious palace with plenty of food and wine and a girl dancing seductively for her stepfather and a gruesome request. It is categorized by excess and imprudence.**

**4. That banquet, however, ended in death: the death of St. John the Baptist.**

**III. The gospel writer seems to intend that we make a contrast between the banquet held at Herod’s palace and the banquet held out in the middle of a grassy field.**

**A. This banquet is not held in the darkness of an ancient banquet hall and it begins not with abundance but with poverty.**

**B. This banquet does not seek happiness in the things of this world, but come completely from the Grace of Christ.**

**C. Finally, Christ’s banquet brings not death but life.**

**IV. But, perhaps the most significant difference between Christ’s banquet and that of Herod’s is the place where it begins.**

**A. What do I mean? We all know it begins with Christ...but it doesn't...not exactly...**

1. The indication of this is also found in the first line of the passage we heard from the Gospel of St. Matthew...
2. Perhaps we did not even notice it or perhaps we thought it was just a kind indication of how our Lord mourned the death of his cousin.
3. The first line of our gospel tells us not simply "When Jesus heard of the death of St. John the Baptist..." it also tells us that "...he withdrew to a deserted place by Himself."
4. He went to converse with his Father...He went to pray.

**B. So, when the people followed him to that deserted place where he was praying, his response was to teach them and cure the sick.**

1. This response of caring for his people was not simply a hiatus from his prayer.
2. The reason that this is included is not simply to show that Christ was so caring that he would interrupt his prayer to attend to their needs.
3. No, the whole purpose here is the fact that the love he had for his Father and the relationship of prayer he had with his Father impelled Him to act with charity toward His people.

**C. Of Gods and men.**

1. Last year a movie was made entitled: "Of Gods and men..."
2. It is about a group of Cistercian Monks who lived in a monastery in Algeria.
3. These monks were not only well respected by their muslim neighbors, but the monks would tend to the communities medical and even some material needs.
4. The movie depicts well how the charitable works of the monks flowed directly from their regular times of prayer and their intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.
5. It also depicts well how, although some monks had thought of leaving, when their lives were threatened; however, their desire to stay was based on the fact that their intimate relationship with Christ impelled them to remain to care for those who were not even Christian.

6. In September of 1996, seven of the monks would be martyred at the hands of muslim extremists

D. Christ, as he taught these people and cured the sick, does so not out of guilt or frustration, but because he knew intimately who he is and why the Father had sent Him.

V. But, different from his teaching and his curing, Christ pauses when it comes to food, doesn't he?

A. Did you notice that he taught the people gathered there and even cured them without enlisting the help of his Apostles.

1. The passage states: "...he cured their sick..."
2. He did not stop and question his apostles, "why don't you cure them."
3. But, when it comes to feeding them, he does not do so without his apostles.

B. Further, it seems no accident that of all the miracles Jesus performed, there is only one that is contained in all four of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...and it is this one...the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

1. There is something special about this miracle that he will not perform it without the participation of his apostles and that it is contained in all four gospels.

C. Finally, this miracle is accompanied by the commentary that "all were satisfied."

1. The live this banquet brings is not fleeting.
2. The banquet of Herod gives pleasure for a moment, the banquet of Christ brings joy which endures.

VI. Although the account of this miracle teaches us how God is communicated to His people, it also gives us a task.

A. You will notice that the only command given to the people is that they must recline on the grass.

1. And, one commentator notes that the word used here for “...they were all satisfied...” means more literally “...they were pastured with grass...”
2. Once again, it is an elusion to his people as sheep.
3. Our role is to allow Christ to shepherd us.
4. The virtue most important for a Christian is docility. Docility to be taught by Christ, cured by Christ and lead by Christ.
5. The thing that prevents Christ from communicating his salvation to us is our lack of docility to making him the center of our lives.

**B. What is this meal then? How do we share in this meal today?**

1. It is not hard to see.
2. The meaning and lesson of this passage of scripture is not the lesson that everyone shared with each other. Put that out of your head!
3. You lose all depth of meaning and purpose in this story and its import for the Christian life when the well-meaning but misguided make such a trite interpretation.
4. Where do we else do we see Christ, take the loaves, break them, look up to heaven, give thanks to the Father and feed the multitude?
5. Where?
  - a) *Yes.*
  - b) *That is right.*
  - c) *The Eucharist.*
  - d) *And, the reason that the joy this food gives endures for all eternity is because it is not of this world but Jesus Christ.*

**VII. Conclusion**

- A. This is no ordinary bread...this is the bread of life.
- B. He communicates it only through His Church for our salvation.
- C. He provides the sanctuary, the altar and the sacrifice.

**D. We must provide ourselves and once transformed be willing to give ourselves completely in return.**

\*-All exegetical material is taken from Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, "Fire of Mercy: Heart of the Word."