

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 10:27

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;
I know them, and they follow me.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 6:30-34; L107B

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught.

He said to them,

“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”

People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.

So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.

People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.

They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Reflecting on the Gospel

The feeding of the multitudes is one of the few stories that are told in all four gospels. It must have made an impact on the early disciples, and it continues to impact us. The story is about how Jesus fulfills humanity's need for food, but at a much deeper level it's also about Jesus fulfilling humanity's most fundamental needs beyond food.

By this time in the gospel narrative Jesus has attracted such attention he can get no “down time.” Even when he and his disciples try to get away, the crowd flocks to them, like the ancient paparazzi!

Jesus meets them, has compassion on them, and teaches them. All of this is a prelude to the multiplication of the loaves in Mark's gospel (6:35-44), but next week we will hear John's version instead.

But in Mark's gospel, by the end of the day, the disciples display an attitude familiar to us: These people will want something to eat. Is that our problem? Let's get this crowd on the road so they can fend for themselves. The disciples seem indignant at Jesus' command to feed the crowd. In response, Jesus takes the loaves and fishes and feeds the crowd in language that can certainly be described as eucharistic. There are four hallmark verbs used in this story that are also used in our eucharistic prayer:

took loaves (bread), *blessed* and *broke* them, and *gave* them to the disciples. Jesus satisfies the deepest longings of the human spirit. In providing them food, they ate and were satisfied. And there were leftovers! Jesus is an abundant giver. The cup runneth over.

This story echoes the prophet Elisha from 2 Kings 4:42-44, where Elisha commanded another man to give his twenty loaves and some grain to a hundred men. Not unlike the disciples, this man was incredulous that the few loaves would feed so many. But, in fact, all were fed and there was more left over. The gospel writers certainly had Elisha in mind when telling the story about Jesus. Some scholars believe Jesus himself had Elisha in mind when feeding the crowd. Perhaps for this reason Jesus was called a prophet by some of his contemporaries, for he acted as the prophets such as Elisha. Also, it is significant that in the story Jesus sees that the crowd was “like sheep without a shepherd”—this line is used frequently in the Old Testament (Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Isa 13:14). The image invokes pastoral imagery rooted in Sacred Scripture. Jesus takes the role of shepherd of this flock, giving them sustenance by his teaching and the multiplication of loaves and fishes.

Often it is heard that the miracle presented here is really one where the five thousand shared the food they had already brought to the place. However, such an interpretation misses both the clear allusion to the prophet Elisha story and the plain sense of the gospel story. Jesus provides more than enough to satisfy humanity's deepest needs both physical and spiritual.



Living the Paschal Mystery

When we are in a relationship with Jesus, we will always have more than enough. Despite any claims to the contrary, Jesus himself will provide an abundance. Our needs will be met and we will be satisfied. When facing other people’s dire circumstances, it can be a challenge not to respond as the disciples did in this gospel story: Why is this my problem? Let them fend for themselves. But we hear Jesus’ command to the disciples as a command to us: “Give them some food yourselves” (Mark 6:37, NABRE). Even though the conditions may seem overwhelming, as Christians we are to do something. Once we start, God provides more than enough to accomplish the task. Giving in to hopelessness or callousness is not the response expected of a disciple of Christ.

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 6:30-34

The Twelve return from their first mission of preaching and healing and report to Jesus. He gathers them in a “deserted” place to rest and regroup, but the people find them and keep coming. Even their attempt to escape by boat to the other side of the lake is foiled once word gets out.

This incident recorded by Mark in today’s gospel (which precedes his account of the feeding of the multitude) offers two important insights into our church’s ministry: The mission of the church does not spring from mass marketing techniques or publicity strategies but from the Gospel of compassion we seek to live and share, from the authority of our commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation. Leadership, inspired by the wisdom of God, means not dictating and ruling over others but inspiring, providing for, and selflessly caring for those whom we are called to lead.

Focusing the First Reading

Jer 23:1-6

In his compassion for the crowd, Jesus becomes the wise and just “shepherd” envisioned by Jeremiah in today’s first reading. Jeremiah sternly rebukes Israel’s “shepherds,” whose self-serving and ineffective leadership have deeply divided the nation. Jeremiah prophesies a new ruler for Israel, “a righteous shoot to David,” who will “reign and govern wisely” and justly. That vision is realized in Jesus’ compassion for the crowd in today’s gospel.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6 (1)

In the images of the compassionate shepherd who leads the people entrusted to him and the generous host of a great banquet welcoming all, the psalmist sings of his unflinching trust in the constant providence of God.

Focusing the Second Reading

Eph 2:13-18

In today’s reading from Ephesians, the apostle praises Christ as “our peace” who reconciles us to God and to one another. In him, we are able to break down the walls that divide Jew and Gentile, a reconciliation to which Paul was especially dedicated.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Who are the “shepherds” in our culture who lead us away from God? What voices should we listen to in our search for God?

What attitudes, gifts, and skills make for a good leader?

Do you have a “deserted place” in your life?

What should we expect and seek from our belonging to a church community?