

23. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN  
“New signs from the Lord”

Jn 6:1-21

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tibe'rias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, “How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii[a] would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Caper'na-um. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened, but he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

Meanwhile, many people were following Jesus after seeing or hearing about the signs He was doing. The sick waited to be healed. The crowds had followed Him to the other side of the Sea of Tiberias. The Passover, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread,

one of the three major Jewish festivals, was approaching. Many of them made pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus had gone up the mountain with His disciples. But when He saw so many people coming to Him (the Scriptures say there were five thousand men), He wanted to satisfy them physically as well. Before He did the sign, Jesus tested the faith of His disciples because, humanly speaking, it would have been impossible to satisfy all that crowd. Perhaps He wanted to see if they already had enough faith, trusting that Jesus would find the right solution in these circumstances.

With the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus performed a great new sign. This miracle awakened the faith of those present, who were convinced that He must be the prophet who was to come into the world. But the Lord fled from them when He realised that they wanted to make Him king, and went up the mountain alone.

Jesus did not come into the world to set up an earthly kingdom. He made this especially clear to Pilate, the representative of Roman power, to whom the Jews had handed Jesus over to be condemned to death. The kingdom of the Lord is not of this world (Jn 18:36). Jesus came to free people from the chains of sin and lead them into the freedom of the children of God. Therefore, during His earthly life, He never collaborated with the political powers, nor did He use political means to establish His kingdom on earth.

Nor was the sign of the multiplication of the loaves intended as an occasion for the people to make Him an earthly king. Rather, it was a sign of the loving providence and omnipotence of the heavenly Father, which was also intended to remind the Jews of the manna with which God had fed His people during their wanderings in the wilderness.

It is important that we Christians who wish to imitate the Lord learn from His example so that we do not resort to the wrong means in proclaiming the Gospel and winning souls for God. Any kind of coercion or manipulation, any instrumentalisation of earthly opportunities, is alien to evangelisation. It is a temptation that has been present throughout the history of the Church.

Let us think of the Lord Himself, the Apostles who followed Him and the great missionaries. They did not proclaim themselves earthly kings with the intention of

extending the Kingdom of God on earth. Their 'kingship' is different, it is not of this world.

Jesus remained on the mountain until evening. When the disciples were in the boat to go to Capernaum, they saw Jesus walking on the sea in a storm. They were frightened, perhaps thinking it was a ghost. But Jesus made Himself known and told them not to be afraid. The disciples then knew that Jesus was also the Lord of the elements and could use His authority in any situation. All this was to strengthen their faith.