



TAKING CARE OF OTHERS

You give them something to eat. (Lk. 9:13)

We are in a lonely place near Bethsaida in Galilee where Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom of God to a large crowd of people. He had gone there with the disciples so they could rest after a long and busy period in that region, during which they had preached and called for conversion 'proclaiming the good news everywhere and healing many people.'ⁱ They were tired but very happy as they recounted what they had experienced. However, when people heard what they had done, they made their way to join them. Jesus welcomes everyone. He listens, speaks and heals and the crowd continues to grow. Evening approaches and hunger sets in. The disciples worry about this fact and propose a logical and realistic solution to their master: 'Send them away, so that they may go to the villages to find food and stay there.' They think that Jesus has already done more than enough.... but he responds:

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They are astounded. They have only five loaves and two fish for a few thousand people; it is not possible to find all that is needed in a little place like Bethsaida, nor do they have the money to pay for it all. Jesus wants to open their eyes. He is deeply touched by the needs and problems of the people and he wants to find a solution for them. He does this by starting from reality and valuing what is there. True, the disciples have very little but he entrusts them with a mission: he asks them to be instruments of God who is mercy and who looks after his children. The Father can intervene and yet he also 'needs' them. The miracle 'needs' our initiative and faith, and then the Father will take it further.

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Jesus understands the disciples' objections but asks them to do their part. Even if their contribution may be small, he does not regard it with disdain nor does he simply solve the problem for them. The miracle takes place but it requires their full participation and their making available all that they have and can procure. This implies a certain sacrifice and trust in Jesus.

Jesus is a teacher and he starts from the events that unfold around us to help us learn how to take care of one another. When we are aware that others are in need, excuses such as 'it's not our job', 'we can't do anything about it' or 'they have to make do like everyone else' have no value at all. According to God's plan for society, blessed are those who feed the hungry, who clothe the poor and who visit those in needⁱⁱ

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This episode recalls a passage found in the book of Isaiah that describes a banquet offered by God himself to all nations when he will 'wipe away the tears on every face.'ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus asks people to sit down in groups of fifty, a number found in Old Testament texts that describe significant occasions. He is the Son but he acts like the Father revealing his divinity.

He himself will give everything, even to the point of becoming food for us in the Eucharist, the new banquet of sharing. During the covid-19 pandemic, the focolare community in Barcelona became aware of the many challenges that the people around them were facing. They used social networks to create a group to collect information about needs and to pool resources. They commented that it was impressive to see how furniture, food, medicine and household appliances were circulated. They said, 'Alone we can do little but together we can do a lot.' Even today, the 'Fent Família' group helps to ensure that no one among them is in need. This is how the first Christians lived.^{iv}

Edited by Silvano Malini & the Word of Life Team

ⁱ Lk. 9:6

ⁱⁱ Cf. Matt. 25:35-40

ⁱⁱⁱ Is. 25:8

^{iv} Cf. Acts. 4:34