

The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Jesus lives entirely for the good of those he loves - us!

August 2, 2020.

St Matthew in this Sunday's Gospel (14:13-21) tells us, ***"When Jesus heard that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself."***

As we know, this was part of the plot of his wife Herodias who figured her position at court was threatened because John was condemning the marriage and Herod liked listening to John the Baptist. Herod had divorced his own wife, Phasaelis and stole his brother's wife and named her Herodias who seized the opportunity of the banquet and had her daughter danced for Herod. When Herod promised the girl anything she wanted, she, at the prompt of her mother, demanded the head of John.

This death moves Jesus deeply for three reasons. First, they had family ties as cousins. Second, they had both received a special mission in the history of salvation. So there was the deep common bond of dedication to God's Kingdom. And thirdly, John's death marked the beginning of a new stage in Christ's mission. The Messenger's job was done, the King's job began to start. And so, with a sorrowful heart and a lot on his mind, Jesus goes away to be alone, to have time to reflect and pray. But the crowd refuse to let Jesus have his time alone. They flock around him, begging for words of wisdom and miracles of healing. And how does Jesus react? He cannot resist their pleas. He puts his own loneliness and preoccupations aside, sits down, and gives audience to the packed crowd: comforting, healing, teaching, listening... All day long attending the needy crowd, when his heart yearned to be alone with his Father! This is our God, a man who knows what it is to be human, to suffer, to feel the weight of things! This is why we can always pour out our hearts to him, knowing that he will understand!

Our Lord is a man who lives entirely for the good of those he loves! We don't have to be afraid of trusting in Jesus or that he will reject us or be disappointed in us. Christ's love isn't based on our qualities or achievements, and so our weaknesses and failures don't drive him away. On the contrary, they draw him to us, just as a sick child draws his mother's attention. **Christ doesn't love us because we earned his love by our achievements; he loves us because his goodness is unconditional and overflowing, especially in the face of our weaknesses, failures, and miseries.**

There is an old story about a king and two beggars dressed in rags. The king announced a banquet in honour of his son's wedding; anyone dressed in royal garments was welcome to attend. Both beggars longed to attend the banquet, but neither had any royal garments. The first beggar spent the day gathering lost coins and doing odd jobs. Finally, he went to the clothing merchant, presented his handful of coins, and asked for some royal robes. But the merchant laughed and said, "You can't buy royal robes for pennies, old man!" The second beggar had a different idea. He made his way to the king's castle, knocked on the gate, and asked to see the king. The guard brought him to the chamberlain, who took the beggar before the king's throne. The beggar, shaking with fright, bowed low and said, "Please, your majesty, if I may be so bold, may I have one of your old garments so that I, too, may come to the banquet tonight?" The beggar was shaking so hard that he could not see the faint smile on the king's face. "You have been wise in coming to me," the king said. He called to his young prince, "Take this man to your room and array him in some of your clothes, so that he too may enjoy the royal hospitality on this glorious night." By our own efforts we could never earn God's love or our salvation. But we don't have to, because he loves us already, and he has given his very life for us. We may be afraid, like the first beggar that if other people found out the truth about us, they would reject us. But not Christ. On the contrary, for him, **our misery is a magnet that attracts his healing, transforming love.**

Now, let's put ourselves back into the second scene from this Sunday's Gospel, **feeding the crowd with five loaves and two fish**. After a long day, Jesus tells his Apostles to have the 5000-plus crowd sit down, and then he blesses the food and has his Apostles distribute it. I always wonder whether some in that crowd refused to eat, waving the Apostles by, saying that they don't need any food, that they were too busy to take the bread. Probably not. Yet, that is exactly what so many people do in society nowadays. Think of our own friends and family members who have stopped coming to Mass on Sunday. How famished their souls must be, starving for the bread of life, the spiritual nourishment that Jesus has baked for them in the oven of his passion! How Jesus longs to feed them with his grace, truth, and mercy. But they are not the only wandering sheep. Even we who believe in Christ often turn down our Lord's gifts. We are too busy to eat.

Christ lived for us. Through the Eucharist, and through all of the other sacraments, he continues living for us. We are Christians; we bear Christ's name, we are called to follow his example. Our mission in this world is to show forth his love, so that all people will believe in Jesus, follow him, and come to eternal life. And we do that by loving others as Christ has loved us. This was Jesus' final commandment, the great desire of his heart: "**Love one another as I have loved you... This is how they will know that you are my disciples: by your love for one another**" (John 15:12, 13:35). There is a hold back for some of us from fulfilling this commandment. We are afraid that if we give what we have: our time, talent, treasure, comfort, to others, we won't have enough left over for ourselves. But today Jesus has wiped out that fear. His Twelve Apostles started with five loaves of bread and two fish, not even enough for themselves. They entrusted their scant supply of food to him, and then in his name they gave it away to others who were in need. Did they go hungry? No! On the contrary, in the end, there were twelve baskets of leftovers - more than what they had started with, an entire basket for each Apostle. **God will never be outdone in generosity. If we give as he has given, we will receive more than we can ever imagine.**

This week, let's take some extra time to come and sit with Jesus, to let him feed our souls: say the rosary, chaplet of Divine Mercy, and maybe attending online daily mass and receiving Eucharist spiritually ... We need his strength for the hard journey of life especially during the pandemic; if we didn't need it, he would never have come to give it to us.