

## 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

### GOSPEL

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When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 'Bring them here to me' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining; twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

(Matthew 14:13-21)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Jesus' actions in the gospel mirror the actions of the Eucharist. He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the people.
- The multiplication miracle is recounted in all four gospels.
- John the Baptist was ordered to be killed by Herod Antipas, who ruled, under the Romans, over the northern province of Galilee. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great, who was King at the time of Jesus' birth. Antipas' career was dominated by his relationship with Herodius, whom he married even though she was his niece and married to his half-brother when they met, and even though he was compelled to divorce his own wife in order to marry her. John was publicly very critical of this marriage, so Antipas had him arrested and later executed. It was Antipas who was the 'King Herod' at the

time of Jesus' death.

- Jesus probably spent some time as a disciple of John the Baptist.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

The death of the Baptist has left Jesus saddened, and he withdraws to be alone with the disciples. But even his personal sorrow is overwhelmed by compassion for the people who had followed him, and he cures their sick. The crowd stays with him, even into the evening.

When the disciples ask Jesus to send them away to eat, Jesus' response is a challenge to the disciples: feed them yourselves. He is training them to take the initiative, to be confident leaders of the community after he has gone. Jesus employs the ritual of the daily Jewish meal in blessing, breaking and giving, but this ritual now points to the actions of the Last Supper. All are fed; all are satisfied. There are overtones of the messianic banquet, a common image in the Hebrew Scriptures describing the reign of God; there is an abundance. The crowd represents all of Israel gathered by Jesus, and the twelve baskets of remainders represent the twelve tribes of Israel gathered by the twelve disciples.

- In this text, the crowd has nothing and Jesus has nothing. The disciples have a little, and what they have they put into Jesus' hands. In our country, where most people have an abundance, how well do we share what we have with the rest of the world?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Jesus takes pity on the crowd who followed him. Share stories of an occasion when you have been moved by compassion for others. What action did you take?
- What needs do I have that only Christ can satisfy?
- What resources ('loaves and fish') do I bring to Christ for him to bless and share?
- Go to a 'deserted place' where you can be alone for a short time. Experience there your own inner hunger and contemplate what it is that satisfies you. Practise this for a short period each day.
- Meals remind us of our dependence on God for the fruits of the earth. It is right that we should thank God for his abundant giving. This week, pray a grace before each meal.

*Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts,*

