

Seven loaves and few fishes

H.E. Msgr. Agostino SUPERBO

December 6th 2000 - St Paul-outside-the-walls

Let us thank the Lord for the gift of closing our Assembly, today, in this Basilica dedicated to the memory of Paul, the great Apostle.

The memory of this Apostle of Jesus Christ reminds us how high was faith in his esteem "I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith" (2 Tm 4,6), he wrote towards the end of his life.

For this faith he consumed his existence and gave his life: "my life is already being poured away as a libation and the time is come for me to depart" (ib. 4,6), he wrote in the same letter to Tomothy.

From the Basilica of St Paul we are going to leave towards our families and our ecclesial communities, to live our faith with gratitude and joy, to witness it with courage and to announce the Gospel of the Lord and have our answer ready for people who ask us the reason for the hope that we have, with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience (cf 1P 3,15).

1. The word of God (Is 25,6-10a; Mt 15,29-37)

Let us stop to contemplate the crowds following Jesus.

They are not made of isolated people looking for an individual consolation; according to Matthew's description, they look as if almost each of them carried upon his shoulders a burden of poverty "the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others" (Mt 15,29). All human poverty is laid down at Jesus' feet, because He wins all evils, heals everybody. The crowds are astonished and praise the God of Israel.

Nevertheless these exulting crowds excite Jesus' compassion.

In fact they have been following him since three days and even without the burden of their sick, they have no strength to go back home.

And then after so many miracles, here is the great miracle: the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes. It is the fulfilment of the great banquet described by prophet Isaiah (First Reading). By eating this food all of them will recover strength and will be able to go back home, showing everybody God's mercy and might.

We too, in this eucharistic celebration, are going to receive not the multiplied human bread, but the bread of eternal life. Without eating the Body and the Blood of the Lord, we would go back home all the same, but without the enthusiasm which is necessary to announce faith out of our assemblies, in the daily trials of our lives, and in the often difficult situations of society. The Lord Jesus turned his eyes towards us, had mercy on us and gave himself to us as food for our journey. Let us thank him from the bottom of our hearts.

2. The memory of St Nicola di Mira

We celebrate today the memory of St Nicola, worshipped in the East and in the West. We have but few historical news about St Nicola, we know he was Bishop of Mira and died about 350 A.D. A late biography of the X century, describes him as a saint of Charity, rescuer of abused children and of those poor girls who were excluded from marriage and therefore from society. The Holy Father, during his pastoral visit to Bari in 1984, addressed to the saint of Mira saying: "Who is your God, Nicola? Who is your God, to whom you bear witness?... Make this God come near us". And John Paul II went on: "The God to whom St Nicola bore witness with his life is the God of Jesus Christ, is the loving Father".

3. Who is our God to whom we bear witness

In this time of Advent, the Holy Liturgy invites us to wait for the God who is coming, to strengthen in ourselves and in the others the wish to meet our Saviour. We are those who receive every day God's mercy, therefore since our Baptism we are called to bear witness to the God of Jesus Christ, the Father who loved the world so much that "he gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3,16). How shall we bear witness to our God? As in the scene described by evangelist Matthew, we too will follow the Lord carrying on our shoulders the burden of our brothers' and sisters' poverty and we will lay it down at his feet. We will bring him with joy, generosity and a simple heart "seven

loaves and few fishes", our little and poor energies, because it is He who will satisfy the hunger of happiness, truth and freedom, that He only can read at the bottom of our brother' and sisters' hearts.

4. Like Mary

The Holy Virgin was aware of her littleness and poverty in front of the great mystery of the Redemption, but she was not afraid to say her fiat to the angel. Thanks to her answer to the angel's announcement, God's mercy revealed itself and came to us in his Son Jesus. Amen.

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THE LASTING ACTUALITY OF A GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT