



(ZENIT, Vatican City, August 17, 2016).- Here is a ZENIT translation of the address Pope Francis gave during this morning's General Audience in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning! Today, we wish to reflect on the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. At the beginning of Matthew's account (cf. 14:13-21), Jesus has just received the news of John the Baptist's death, and He crosses the lake in a boat, seeking "a deserted place by himself" (v. 13). The people, however, caught on and went ahead of Him on foot, so that "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick." (v. 14). Jesus was like this: always with compassion, always thinking of others. The determination of the people who feared to be left alone, as though abandoned, is impressive. John the Baptist, the charismatic prophet, being dead, they entrust themselves to Jesus, of whom John himself had said: "The one who is coming after me is mightier than I." (*Matthew* 3:11). So, the crowds follow Him everywhere, to hear Him and to bring the sick to Him. And, seeing this, Jesus is moved. Jesus is not cold; He does not have a cold heart. Jesus can be moved. On one hand, He feels bound to this crowd and does not want them to go away; on the other, He is in need of moments of solitude, of prayer, with the Father. He spends many nights praying with His Father.

So, that day also, the Master dedicated Himself to the people. His compassion is not a vague sentiment; instead, it shows all the strength of His will to be close to us and to save us. Jesus loves us so much and wants to be close to us.

When it was evening, Jesus was concerned to feed all those tired and hungry people, and He takes care of all those who follow Him. And He wants to involve His disciples in this. In fact, He says to them: "you give them

something to eat” (v. 16). And He showed them that the few loaves and fish they had — with the strength of faith and prayer —, could be shared by all those people. Jesus wrought a miracle, but it is the miracle of faith, of prayer, aroused by compassion and love. So Jesus “*broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds*” (v. 19). The Lord goes to meet men’s needs, but He wants to make each one of us concretely participant of His compassion.

Now, we pause on Jesus’ gesture of blessing: He took “*the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them*” (v. 19). As can be seen, these are the same signs that Jesus carried out in the Last Supper; and they are also the same that every priest carries out when he celebrates the Holy Eucharist. The Christian community is born and reborn continually of this Eucharistic Communion. To live communion with Christ, therefore, is altogether other than remaining passive and estranged from daily life; on the contrary, it inserts us increasingly in our relation with the men and women of our time, to offer them a concrete sign of mercy and of Christ’s care. While nourishing us with Christ, little by little the Eucharist we celebrate also transforms us into the Body of Christ and spiritual food for brothers. Jesus wants to reach everyone, to bring to all the love of God. Therefore, He renders every believer a servant of mercy. Jesus saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them and He multiplied the loaves; He does the same with the Eucharist. And we believers, who receive this Eucharistic bread, are driven by Jesus to bring this service to others, with His same compassion. This is the way.

The account of the multiplication of loaves and fish ends with the verification that all were satisfied and with the gathering of the left over pieces (cf. v. 20). When, with His compassion and His love, Jesus gives us a grace, He forgives us our sins, He embraces us, He loves us, He does not do things by half, but completely. As happened here, all are satisfied. Jesus fills our heart and our life with His love, with His forgiveness, with His compassion. Hence Jesus allowed His disciples to carry out His order. Thus they know the way to follow: to feed the people and keep them united; to be, that is, *at the service of life and of communion*. Therefore, we invoke the Lord, may He always render His Church capable of this holy service, so that every one of us is able to be an instrument of communion in our own family, at work, in the parish and in groups of memberships, a visible sign of the mercy of God, who does not want to leave anyone in solitude and in need, so that communion and peace and men’s communion with God descend among men, because this communion is life for all.

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

Greeting in Italian

I greet affectionately the Italian-speaking pilgrims, in particular the Sisters of Saint Anne, the faithful of the Holy Mary of Carmel parish in Manfredonia, the group of the oratories of Borgomanero and Rivolta d'Adda.

Finally, I turn to the young people, the sick and the newlyweds. The Solemnity of the Assumption, which we celebrated a few days ago, invited us to live with commitment the journey of this world constantly turned to eternal goods.

Dear young people, in building your future always put Christ's call in the first place. You, dear sick, have in your suffering the comfort of Mary's maternal presence, sign of hope. I wish for you, dear newlyweds, that your love is a mirror of the infinite and eternal of God.

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