



Homily for 8/2/2020

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Space for Prayer

This Sunday's Gospel speaks to us about the miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes. For sure, this is a miracle worth pondering, as it is a prefiguration of the Eucharist, which is the "source and summit" of our Christian life. The catechism tells us: "[1335](#) The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist."

But I would like to focus on the beginning of this Scripture passage, as I believe it introduces us to the key to understand the power of Eucharistic Communion through the life of prayer.

This passage begins with Jesus hearing about the death of his cousin John the Baptist. Many of us can relate to hearing the news of the death of a loved one. Many of us can make the connection with the sentiments of the heart associated with hearing about bad things that tend to make us sad. We can learn from our Lord and Master how to react to these things by following Jesus' example. What does he do? He withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. Immediately here we see what will become for us a great image of what we call the interior life. The interior life of the heart, of prayer, of being alone with God, is often described as a desert or a deserted place. In order to pray, one needs solitude and freedom from distractions. One needs silence from noises. Jesus often in the Scriptures went off into a deserted place by himself. In order to go deeper into his soul, he had to flee the trappings of this world. His physical space was reflective of his interior space. In God's providence and with a twist of irony that is characteristic of the ways of God, this deserted place, devoid of the normal sources of food thought necessary to feed the body, will be revealed the source of the spiritual food that feeds the soul to the point of satisfaction. "They all ate and were satisfied."

I had this great experience earlier this year when I went on sabbatical to the Monastery of Christ in the Desert. There I was away from all distractions. There was no cell phone signal, no TV, none of the normal distractions that constantly keep us attached to the world. There I experienced the deserted place that Jesus had sought out in his own earthly journey. Distractions are the greatest impediment in our day to a deep life of prayer. The Catechism says:

"[2729](#) The habitual difficulty in prayer is *distraction*. It can affect words and their meaning in vocal prayer; it can concern . . . vocal prayer (liturgical or personal), meditation, and contemplative prayer. To set about hunting down distractions would be to fall into their trap, when all that is necessary is to turn back to our heart: for a distraction reveals to us what we are attached to, and this humble awareness before the Lord should awaken our preferential love for him and lead us resolutely to offer him our heart to be purified. Therein lies the battle, the choice of which master to serve."

Which master do we serve? In the deserted place, freed from distractions, the battle field becomes clearer, but this is hard to discern in the guerrilla warfare of the modern world. The attempt to pray is often a battle in itself. As the Catechism says: "[2726](#) In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us *erroneous notions of prayer*. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: they 'don't have the time.' Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone."



We have to avail ourselves of the Spirit's promptings to go to the deserted place reserved for the encounter with God. Where do you find your "deserted place" to go "by yourself" before God?

The Catechism teaches us about places favorable for prayer: "[2691](#) The church, the house of God, is the proper place for the liturgical prayer of the parish community. It is also the privileged place for adoration of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The choice of a favorable place is not a matter of indifference for true prayer. For personal prayer, this can be a 'prayer corner' with the Sacred Scriptures and icons, in order to be there, in secret, before our Father. In a Christian family, this kind of little oratory fosters prayer in common. In regions where monasteries exist, the vocation of these communities is to further the participation of the faithful in the Liturgy of the Hours and to provide necessary solitude for more intense personal prayer. Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer. For pilgrims seeking living water, shrines are special places for living the forms of Christian prayer 'in Church.'"

Besides a physical place for the spiritual life to flourish we also need temporal space. We need to set aside time for prayer. Again the Catechism gives us some wisdom: "[2698](#) The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer. Some are daily, such as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours. Sundays, centered on the Eucharist, are kept holy primarily by prayer. The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are also basic rhythms of the Christian's life of prayer."

The catechism continues, "[2710](#) The choice of the *time and duration of the prayer* arises from a determined will, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: **one makes time for the Lord**, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into **inner prayer**, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. The heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith."

But the battle of prayer continues. Even once we set aside a place and time for prayer, then we have to ask what it is we are doing? The catechism says: "[2699](#) The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer. However, Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. They have one basic trait in common: composure of heart. This vigilance in keeping the Word and dwelling in the presence of God makes these three expressions intense times in the life of prayer."

But there are temptations that attempt to derail our attempts to pray. "[2732](#) The most common yet most hidden temptation is our *lack of faith*. It expresses itself less by declared incredulity than by our actual preferences. When we begin to pray, a thousand labors or cares thought to be urgent vie for priority; once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love? Sometimes we turn to the Lord as a last resort, but do we really believe he is [a last resort]? Sometimes we enlist the Lord as an ally, but our heart remains presumptuous. In each case, our lack of faith reveals that we do not yet share in the disposition of a humble heart: 'Apart from me, you can do *nothing*.'"

All this being said, in order for us to appreciate the rest of the passage for today on the Eucharist, we have to have a heart open to receiving our Lord. St. John Paul II said, "The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease." - John Paul II, *Dominicae cenae*, 3.



We hear about many things these days that disturb our peace and shake our faith. How do we react and respond? Let us seek in wisdom the way of the Master and follow Jesus to the deserted place where he desires to feed us with a super-abundance of his love outpoured.