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## Reflection on Mark 6, 30-44

# Only what is put on the table will be transformed

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Mark tells us a story of feeding the multitudes as they appear frequently in the Gospels. In the classical interpretation of this story, just as in the classical catechesis regarding the Eucharist, there is an almost exclusive emphasis on the work of God and his real presence. In this way an image of the Eucharist develops in which we human beings play a very passive role. What we have learned is: Be grateful! Be worthy! And be receptive!

However, in all the stories about the feeding of the multitudes which Jesus undertook, he adds something essential right from the start: »You give them something to eat« (Mark 6, 37). In other words, be active and act! There is no story of the feeding of the multitudes in the Gospels or in our daily lives in which Jesus acts without his disciples. He always draws them into the action.

Mark demonstrates this in impressive fashion. The disciples must first go and look for what is at their disposal. »How many loaves have you? Go and see!« (Mark 6, 38). They must bring forth that which they have found, namely, 5 loaves and 2 fish. They must be willing to invest these gifts, to place them in Jesus' hands so that, through his blessing and the willingness to

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share, all might be fed. »Taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves. . . .« And then comes the crowning moment. He does not distribute the bread, but rather lets the disciples do it. The actual action with the bread must be carried out by the disciples. » . . .and gave them to his disciples to set before the people«.

Nico Derksen has called this process a fundamental principle of the Eucharist and described it in this way: »Only what is put on the table will be transformed«.

When we pray to God we say, »YOU satisfy the hunger of your people!« But God wants to make the satisfaction of hunger in his people into a common project with his people. What God does not do is to transform our emptiness. The feeding of his people is not the magical production of a bread that was never at hand. The four expectations of the feeding of the multitudes count today for every person who wishes to live eucharistically.

1. We must look for what is at our disposal.
2. We need to bring along what is within our possibilities.
3. We must be prepared to invest it and to share it so that all can live,
4. We must distribute the bread ourselves. (the actual action)

Jesus insists that we place that which we have on the table, that we place it at his disposal. For only that which is placed on the table will be transformed.

It is not empty water jars of Cana that are suddenly filled with wine, but water that was sought, carried and poured into jars that is transformed into quality wine. And this water needed to be fetched by human hands. Only what is placed on the table will be transformed.

It is important to repeatedly remind ourselves about a falsehood regarding our faith. We do not recognize God in bread, but in the breaking of the bread (cf. Luke 24). He is recognized in the fundamental, concrete readiness to share. Until this day, it is the only gesture which we Christians practice every Sunday. We do not baptise on every Sunday. We do not confirm on every Sunday. We do not anoint the sick every Sunday. But no Sunday passes on which we do not break the bread.

Unbroken bread is no sign for the presence of God. It is sign for hoarding, for grasping, for the fear of letting go and for possessiveness. But, this is not a matter of possessiveness, not in the Gospel and not in the Eucharist. It is a matter of transformation and of that which is necessary so that transformation can take place.

In John's Gospel there is a shattering scene in which Jesus attempts to win back an old friend, namely, Judas Iscariot. How does he do this? By giving Judas a piece of bread. Twice the storyteller recounts: »After Judas received the piece of bread. . . .« (John 13, 27) and »So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out«. (John 13, 30) In case you missed it, he takes the bread, but he does not eat it.

Imagine you would invite me to coffee and cake. I arrive at 3 pm with a bag in which I package the cake and a thermos into which I pour the coffee. I thank you and leave. Now, you were willing to give me the cake and the coffee, otherwise you would hardly have invited me. But this is not the meaning of the table. It is a matter of what is supposed to happen at the table, in the sharing and in the encounter.

It is not about possessiveness. It is about transformation and what is needed so that it can take place. It is about the desire of God to transform what we are willing to give so that we do not fall back into the role of the eternal spectator of life. It is about the transformation in which God takes, blesses, breaks and gives what we place on the table, so that he can draw more life out of it; so that he can pour more life into it; so that he can pour himself into it.

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Only what is placed on the table will be transformed. That is the fundamental Eucharistic principle. And this fundamental principle is valid everywhere where people desire transformation.

- In relationships: Nothing is healed if that which moves us is not placed on the table.
- In the protection of the planet: A refusal to acknowledge global warming or the even the fact that we have an environmental crisis will not protect our common home. If we are not even allowed to mention the problem, if ignore it, suppress it or deny it, then it is never put onto the table. But only what is placed on the table will be transformed.
- In the society: Our crises and fears cannot be overcome through demonstrations and hate tirades. Dialogue and sharing alone can lead to understanding.

As a theology student, the Eucharistic mysteries were hammered into me. The Father is asked to send the Spirit upon the bread and wine. The Spirit is to transform the bread and wine so that Jesus Christ can be present in our midst. It was made very clear, that the Eucharist is a work of God.

What was never mentioned in all those years was one simple fact. If we do not bring bread and wine and place them on the altar, then nothing happens. Nothing at all. Only what is placed on the table will be transformed.

The Eucharist is indeed a work of God, but one which he does not wish to undertake without us. An essential part of the Eucharist lays in our hands.

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