

“You feed them!”--Mark 6:37

“You feed them!” Really now, did you ever really stop to think about that? Just tell me please, what with? How could the disciples obey that command?

Let us pause and recall the scene. The Sacred Text affirms that there were about five thousand men, without counting the women and children. Now then, whenever you see a crowd of people, what is there usually the most of—is it not women and children? In other words, I suppose that crowd was made up of at least 15,000 people. Okay, now try to imagine that you are one of those twelve disciples and you have just heard the Master say: “**You** feed them!” Now what? Did the disciples have anything? As a matter of fact, no. They had neither money (which would not have helped much since they were a long way from town) nor food. Even the five loaves and two fish belonged to somebody else.

Can it be that Jesus was playing a joke on them, or was He serious? I do not know, but I prefer to think that He would not make a joke out of such a situation. But if He was serious, how could the disciples obey? Only with a miracle. In fact, they could not see a solution and gave the problem back to Jesus to solve; which He did. But did Jesus Himself hand the bread and fish to the crowd? No. Let us think about that scene a little more and we will see that the disciples still had to exercise faith.

The Record affirms that they all ate until they were “full” or “satisfied”. It was not just a little something to tide them over. Have you ever considered how much bread and fish it would take to “fill” 15,000 people (who had gone without lunch)? It seems to me certain that when Jesus blessed and broke those loaves and fish there was not an instant multiplication, such that there was enough for everybody; the tremendous pile would have buried Jesus, the disciples and the closest of the people! Really. Just stop and think about it. It must not have been instantaneous. When Jesus placed some bread and fish in the hands of each disciple that was all there was, up to that moment.

Now then, try to imagine that you are one of those disciples with a handful of bread and fish, and you have to feed at least a thousand people (12 disciples and 15,000 people). Can you picture it? Wouldn't you feel just a little ridiculous taking that first step toward the crowd? Somehow the disciples find the courage and approach the people. The first one helps himself and, wonder of wonders, the supply is undiminished! The second one helps himself and the supply is unchanged. It was never used up—as they went around distributing, the food kept multiplying (to have twelve bushels of leftovers, the people were also involved in passing it on). If they had tired and stopped in the middle, half the people would have stayed hungry. If the disciples had decided to eat first, I rather imagine that the miracle would have been frustrated and the crowd would have gone hungry. The disciples ate last, but they ate very well, thank you very much! (Have you ever tried eating a bushel of bread?)

I tend to smile, thinking about that picture, until I remember that the Lord Jesus is still telling us: “You give them something to eat”—only this time it is no less than 2,000 ethnic groups and 2.5 billion people perishing from an absolute lack of the Bread of Life. And we, like the disciples, say, “With what, Lord?” As long as we are looking at our empty hands, we will not find the courage to face the challenge of the lost world. It does not depend on our empty hands, it depends on Jesus' full hands! It does not depend on our weakness and smallness, it depends on **Jesus**, on what He has and can do. We have to learn how to collaborate with God, and actually do it. In short, we need to understand how God's economy works.