

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(Jn. 6:1-15) TRACK B 023

[Poem Vol. 2, pp. 743-7, Vol. 4, pp. 315-24, 326-8;

Gospel Vol. 4, pp. 338-43, Vol. 7, pp. 264-75, 278-80]

(When Jesus sets foot on the right bank of the Jordan, He finds a large crowd waiting for Him. After He speaks at length to the crowd, the apostles say to Him:)

« Master, evening is approaching. This is a desert place, far from houses and villages, and it is shady and damp. In a short while it will not be possible to see or to walk here. The moon rises late. Dismiss the people, so that they may go to villages along the Jordan, to buy food and to find lodgings. »

« They need not go » says Jesus. « Give them something to eat. They can sleep here, as they did when they were waiting for Me. »

« Master, You know that there are only five loaves left, and two fish. »

« Bring them to Me. »...

Andrew goes away at once. John and Philip also look for Marjiam (the orphan boy whom they are looking after) among the crowds, who continuously change place. They find him almost simultaneously... There are seven boys with him, playing...

Marjiam leaves his friends... But the other boys follow him, and Jesus is soon surrounded by a circle of children... He caresses them, while Philip takes a parcel out of his bag containing some loaves, which are wrapped together with two big fish: there are two kilograms of fish, or a little more. They would not suffice for the eighteen people... of Jesus' group. They take the food to the Master.

« Very well » says Jesus. « Now bring Me some baskets. Seventeen, as many as you are. Marjiam will hand the food to the children... » Jesus stares at a scribe, who has always been near Him, and asks: « Will you give food to the hungry people, too? »

The scribe replies: « I would like to. But I have none myself. »

Jesus says: « Give Mine. I will let you have it. »

« But... are You going to satisfy five thousand men, besides women and children, with those two fish and the five loaves? »

« Undoubtedly » says Jesus. « Do not be incredulous. Those who believe, will see the miracle being accomplished. »

« Oh! In that case, I want to hand out the food, too! »

Jesus tells him: « Well then, get someone to give you a basket. »

The apostles come back with baskets and hand-baskets, some of which are low and wide, others are deep and narrow. The scribe comes back with a rather small one...

Then Jesus says: « Good. Leave everything here. Get the crowds to sit in an orderly way, in rows, as far as possible. »

And while they do that, Jesus raises the loaves with the fish on top of them, offers them, prays, and blesses them. The scribe does not take his eyes off Jesus for a moment. Jesus breaks the five loaves into eighteen parts; He also makes eighteen parts of the two fish, and puts a bit of fish - a tiny bit indeed - into each basket. He then breaks each of the eighteen bits of bread into morsels: each bit into many morsels. Relatively many; about twenty, not more. He then puts each bit which He has broken into morsels, into a basket, with the bit of fish.

« Now take them and hand the food out to fill everybody. Go. Marjiam, hand the food out to your companions. »

« Ah! How heavy it is! » says Marjiam lifting his basket. He goes at once towards his little friends, walking like one who carries a heavy weight.

The apostles, disciples... and the scribe, watch him go - incredulously... They then pick up their baskets, and shaking their heads they say to one another: « The boy is joking! They are the same weight as before. » And the scribe looks inside his basket, puts his hand into it searching for the bottom - because it is getting dark in the thicket where Jesus is - whereas farther away, in the glade, it is clear. Notwithstanding their remarks, they go towards the people, and begin to hand the food out... Now and again they look back at Jesus, thoroughly astonished, as they move farther and farther away. And the Master, leaning against a tree with folded arms, smiles at their astonishment.

The distribution takes a long time, and is plentiful... the only one who shows no surprise is Marjiam, who smiles, and is happy to be able to fill the laps of so many poor children, with bread and fish. He is also the first to go back to Jesus saying: « I have dealt out so much, so much!... because I know what it is to be hungry... » And he raises his little face... and looks at Jesus with wide open eyes... Jesus caresses him, and a bright smile appears on Marjiam's face, while he leans trustfully against Jesus, His Master and Protector.

The apostles and disciples come back slowly, dumbfounded with amazement. Last is the scribe, who says nothing. But he makes a gesture that is more than a sermon. He kneels down and kisses the hem of Jesus' tunic.

Jesus says: « Take your share, and give Me some. Let us eat the food of God. »

They eat... each according to his need...

In the meantime, the people, who are now satisfied, exchange their impressions. Those around Jesus make their comments, watching Marjiam, who finishes his food, and plays with the other children.

« Master » asks the scribe, « why did the boy feel the weight at once, and we did not? I searched inside. There were still the few morsels of bread, and the one piece of fish. I began to feel the weight when I moved towards the crowd. But if it had weighed what I gave out, it would have taken a pair of mules to carry it, not in a basket, but with a wagon packed with food. At the beginning, I was dealing it out sparingly... but later I gave, and gave... and as I did not want to be unfair, I went back to the first ones, and gave them more, because I had given them only a little at first. And yet, it was enough. »

And John says: « I felt the basket was getting heavy when I set out, and I gave plenty at once, because I realised that You had worked a miracle. »

Manaen, another disciple, says: « I stopped, I sat down, and poured everything on my lap to see... And I saw loaves and loaves. I then went on. »

And Bartholomew says: « I even counted them... There were fifty small loaves. So I said: I will give them to fifty people, and then I will go back ». And I counted. But when I got to fifty, the weight was still the same. I looked inside. There were so many. I went on, and I handed out hundreds of them. They never diminished. »

And Thomas: « I must admit, I did not believe, and I took the morsels of bread and the bit of fish in my hand, and I looked at them saying: "What's the use of them? Jesus must have been joking!... " and I looked at them over and over again, hiding behind a tree, hoping and despairing to see them grow. But they were always the same. I was about to come back, when Matthew passed by saying: "Have you noticed how beautiful they are?". "What?" I asked him. "The loaves and fish!... " he said. "Are you mad?" I replied. "I can only see morsels of bread". And Matthew said: "Go and hand them out with faith, and you will see". I threw the few morsels back into the basket, and I went reluctantly... And then... forgive me, Jesus, because I am a sinner! »

« No, Thomas. You are a worldly spirit. You reason according to the world. »

« I as well, Lord » says Judas Iscariot. « So much so, that I was thinking of giving a coin with the bread, and I said to myself: "They will eat somewhere else". I was hoping to help You cut a finer figure. So what am I? Like Thomas, or moreso? »

« You are much more "worldly" than Thomas. »

« And yet I was thinking of giving alms, to be "heavenly"! It was my own personal money... »

« Alms to yourself, to your pride » says Jesus. « And alms to God. But the Latter does not need them, and it is a sin to give alms to your pride, not a merit. »

Judas lowers his head, and becomes silent.

Simon the Zealot says: « I, instead, thought that I had to crumble the morsel of fish and the morsel of bread, so that they would suffice. I did not doubt they would be sufficient, both with regard to numbers, and nourishment. A drop of water given by You can be more nourishing than a banquet. »

« And what did you think? » Peter asks Jesus' two cousins.

« We remembered Cana... and did not doubt » replies Judas Thaddeus, gravely.

« And you, James, My dear brother, were you thinking only of that? » asks Jesus.

« No, I thought it was a sacrament... Is it so, or am I wrong? »

Jesus smiles: « It is, and it is not... It is not yet a sacrament. »

The scribe is holding a crumb in his hand.

« What are you going to do with it? » asks Jesus.

« A... souvenir » he replies.

« I will keep one too. I will put it round Marjiam's neck, in a little bag » says Peter.

« And I will take it to our mother » says John.

« And what about us? We have eaten it all... » say the others, sorrowfully.

And Jesus says: « Stand up. Go round again with the baskets, and collect the remaining scraps. Select the poorest people, and bring them here with the baskets...

The apostles obey... and they come back with twelve baskets full of remnants of food, and followed by about thirty beggars or very poor people...

(At another time, Jesus has been invited to a dinner by Chuza, a high-ranking dignitary and the husband of Jesus' woman disciple Joanna. There are a number of others present - some friendly to Jesus, and some not so. When the main course of the dinner has been completed, Chuza addresses Jesus:)

« Master » he begins. « You must have wondered why we held this meeting, and why we have been so silent. But what we have to tell You is very grave, and is not to be heard by imprudent ears... As You can see, all the people present have the greatest respect for You. You are among men who venerate You as Man, and as Messiah. Your justice, Your wisdom, the gifts of which God has made You master, are known and admired by us. You are, for us, the Messiah of Israel. Messiah according to the spiritual idea, and the political one. You are the Expected One, who will put an end to the grief and dejection of a whole population... You have here, before You, all Israel in the representatives of the several classes of this eternal people, Punished but beloved by the Most High, Who proclaims it "His". You have the pulsating wholesome heart of Israel with the members of the Sanhedrin and the priests; You have power and holiness with Pharisees and Sadducees; You have wisdom with scribes and rabbis; You have politics and value with Herodians; You have wealth with rich people; You have the population with merchants and landowners... Almost without any word, without whatever imposition, You have gathered us, a people divided by misfortunes, by hatred, by political and religious ideas. And You have reconciled us. O Prince of Peace, rejoice at having redeemed and restored, even before assuming sceptre and crown. Your kingdom, the expected Kingdom of Israel, has begun. Our wealth, our power, our swords are at Your feet. Speak! Order! The hour has come. »

Everybody approves of Chuza's speech. Jesus, His arms folded on His chest, is silent.

« Are You not speaking? Are You not replying, Lord? You are perhaps amazed at the situation... Perhaps You feel unprepared, and You doubt above all whether Israel is prepared... But it is not so. Listen to our voices... »

(One of the others then says:)

« Many of us have fought against You. Those who are afraid of Your wise manner of reigning. But the people are with You, and the best of us are with the people. We are in need of a wise man. »

« We need a pure man » says another.

Another: « A true king. »

Another: « A saint. »

And another: « A Redeemer. We are more and more enslaved to everything and to everybody. Defend us, Lord! »...

Jesus is still silent. He is the only one to be sitting calmly, as if the matter did not concern Him, in the middle of about forty hotheaded men, of whose arguments I can grasp only a tiny part, as they are all speaking at the same time, making a terrible din. He maintains His attitude and remains silent.

They all shout: « Say a word! Answer! »

Jesus stands up slowly, pushing His hands on the edge of the table. There is dead silence. While eighty eyes aflame with curiosity stare at Him, He opens His lips. And the others do likewise, as if they want to inhale His reply. The reply is short, but resolute: « No. »

« What? Why? Are You betraying us? You are betraying Your people! He is disowning His mission! He is repudiating God's order!... »

What a hullabaloo! What an uproar! Many faces become crimson, while eyes are inflamed and hands are agitated, threateningly... Rather than loyal supporters, they look like enemies...

A strange silence follows the uproar. It looks as if, having exhausted their strength, they all feel worn out and overwhelmed. They look at one another inquisitively, desolately... some are upset...

Jesus looks around and says: « I knew that this was the reason why you wanted Me. And I knew that your attempt was useless... I came to prove to You that I am not afraid of any deceit, because My hour has not come yet. Neither will I be afraid when the ambush against Me takes place, because I came just for that. And I came to convince you.

Not everybody, but many of you are in good faith. But I must correct the error, into which you have fallen, in good faith. See? I do not reproach you. I do not reproach anybody, not even those, who - being My faithful disciples - ought to act with justice, and control their passions with justice... »

He points at this one and that one, without resentment, but with sadness... and He continues: « I do not reproach you, because I know... that it is the Enemy who is working in you, and you are - without being aware of it - entirely dominated by him... He, the Cursed One, makes use of you to harm people, and to harm Me. But I say to you - and to those... who would like Me to agree to become king - I say: No. My Kingdom is not of this world. Come to Me, that I may establish My Kingdom in you, and nothing else. And now let Me go »...

(But they argue with Jesus, and become more and more excited...)

And Jesus says: « ...What did Satan do to you, o Hebrews, wise people, to make you fall into error concerning the prophetic truths? What is he doing to you, o Hebrews, My brothers, to make you so blind? What is he doing to you, My disciples, that you, as well, no longer understand? The greatest misfortune of a people, and of a believer, is to fall into false interpretation of signs. And such misfortune is taking place now. Personal interests, prejudice, craziness, false love of the fatherland, everything helps to create the abyss... the abyss of error, in which a people will perish, failing to recognise its King... Three quarters of you who are gathered here, want to harm Me, not to help Me, and you are aware of that. You are acting out of hatred, not out of love. But I forgive you. I say to honest-hearted people: "Come to your senses, do not be the unconscious servants of evil". Let Me go. There is nothing further to be said. »

They all become silent, greatly surprised...

Eleazar (a disciple) says: « I am not hostile to You. I thought I was doing the right thing. And I am not the only one... Some good friends think as I do. »...

« You have made us compromise ourselves, You are harming us... » shout others: Herodians, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests...

Jesus leaves the table and goes towards the group, darting glances at them. What flashing eyes! The group unintentionally becomes silent and presses against the wall... Jesus goes really face to face with them, and in a low voice, but with incisiveness cutting like a slash, He says: « It is written: "A curse on him who strikes down his neighbour in secret, and accepts a bribe to take an innocent life". I say to you: I forgive you. But your sin is known to the Son of man. (Slowly) If I did not forgive you... (pause) Many people in Israel were incinerated by Jehovah, for much less. » He is so terrible in saying this, that no one dare move, and Jesus pulls aside the double heavy curtain and goes out into the hall, without anyone daring to make a gesture.

Only when the curtain stops waving - that is, after a few minutes - they rouse.

« We must reach Him... We must hold Him... » say the most enraged ones.

(Sadly) « We must get Him to forgive us » say - with a sigh - the better ones...

They rush out of the room. They look for Him, they ask the servants:

« The Master, where is He? »

The Master? No one has seen Him, not even those who were at the two doors in the hall. He is nowhere... With torches and lamps they search for Him in the shadows of the garden, and in the room where He had rested. He is not there, neither can they find the mantle He had left on the bed, or the bag which had been left in the hall...

There is a clamour of different opinions... and the two groups fight against each other...

And where is Jesus? I see Him, of His own accord, when He is very far away, near the bridge across the inlet of the Jordan. He is walking fast, as if He were carried by the wind. His hair is waving round His pale face, and His mantle is flapping like a sail, as He walks with vigorous strides. Then, when He is sure that He is at a good distance, He plunges into the bog grass

near the shore, to the eastern bank. As soon as He finds the first rocks of the high cliff, He begins to climb up, heedless of the danger in climbing the cliffy coast in faint light. He climbs up as far as a rock jutting out over the lake, and watched over by an age-old oak-tree. He sits down there, He rests an elbow on one of His knees, and His chin in the palm of His hand. And He stares at the darkening vast expanse, just visible mainly because of His white garments and the pallor of His face...

But someone has followed Him: John. John is half-naked, that is, he is wearing the short tunic of fishermen, his hair is stiff and smooth as is typical of people who have been in water, he is panting, and nevertheless pale. He approaches his Jesus slowly: he seems a shadow sliding on the rugged cliff. He stops not very far away. He watches Jesus... He doesn't move. He looks like a rock, fixed to the rock. His dark tunic makes him even more inconspicuous: only his face and bare legs and arms can just be seen in the darkness of the night.

But when he hears - rather than sees - Jesus weep, he can resist no longer, and he approaches Him and then calls Him: (Softly) « Master! »

Jesus hears the whisper and looks up: He gathers His clothes ready to flee.

But John shouts: « What have they done to You, Master, that You no longer recognise John? »

And Jesus recognises His Beloved. He stretches out His arms, John throws himself into them, and they both weep over two different sorrows, and one only love...

« I have been watching You since You came here... Were You weeping?... What have they done to You, my Lord? Did they insult You? Did they strike You? »

« No. They wanted to make Me king. A poor king, John! And many were in good faith, they were acting out of love, for a good purpose... Most of them... to be able to denounce Me, and get rid of Me... »

(They talk some more, then Jesus says:)

« You are cold, John! Come here, under My mantle... »

« No, at Your feet, like this... My Master! Why does everybody not love You as much as the poor boy, who is I? »

Jesus draws him upon His heart, sitting beside him. « Because they do not have your heart of a child... »

« They wanted to make You king? But have they not understood yet that Your Kingdom is not of this Earth? »

« They have not understood! »

(Jesus explains more to John, who then says:)

« How much You are suffering, Jesus!... »

« How much I redeem! But you console Me in My suffering. We shall depart from here at dawn. We shall find a boat. If I say to you that we shall be able to proceed without oars, will you believe Me? »

«I would believe You even if You said that we can go without a boat... »

They remain embraced, enveloped only in Jesus' mantle. And John, tired as he is, ends up by falling asleep in the warmth, like a child in its mother's arms.

(Jesus comments to Maria Valtorta, whom He calls His "little John":)

« In the sixth chapter of John's Gospel (verse 15) he says: "When He realised that they wanted to abduct Him to make Him king, He escaped back to the hill by Himself"... Great John, many years after the event, told what he knew. Subtly linking together places and events, he revealed the secret, of which he alone was aware, of the attempt perpetrated maliciously to crown the Christ...

Little John. This has been one of Satan's hours for Me. As the Christ had them, so will the little Christs have them. One must suffer them, and overcome them, with humility and confidence. They are not without a purpose. And a good purpose. But be not afraid. During such hours God does not forsake, but He supports those who are faithful. Then Love descends to make the faithful ones kings. And even more, when the hour of the Earth is over, the faithful ones ascend to the Kingdom, in peace for ever, victorious for ever...

My peace, little John, crowned with thorns... My peace... »