

Donnybrook

15 February 2022

Welcome

For those of us attending Mass every day, the nearly complete reading from Mark's Gospel is of great benefit. We hear the stories in the context of Mark's overall narrative. From time to time, Mark offers a scene which is really puzzling and the Gospel we have just heard is perhaps the best example. Jesus asks no fewer than seven questions, increasing in intensity. The final question is exasperated: Do you still not understand?

Topic

What is it the disciples, Mark's reader and we are not getting and are supposed to understand?

Steps

It may help to remember this much. Mark is writing for a community which is finding it difficult to integrate Jews and non-Jews, Gentiles. To make his position clear, he tells the story of the multiplication of the loaves twice. The first time, it happens in Jewish territory, with many echoes of Moses, representing Israelites. The second time, it is located in Gentile territory, with many echoes of Elijah, representing non-Israelites. This repetition has a purpose, as can be seen from today's Gospel, when the two distinct multiplications are referred to.

In brief, Mark is saying that unless you see that Jesus is bread of life for both Jew and Gentile, you do not know who Jesus is. Here Mark is very close to Paul:

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

In a word, if you cannot welcome each other without distinction at the table of the Lord, you are failing not just in practice but in faith. Jesus came to satisfy the hunger of all without distinction. This is not simply a failure in sacramental practice, it is also a failure to understand who Jesus is and God's project in Jesus.

Conclusion

This is a challenge for us today, because we Catholics exclude from the table of the Lord. We exclude, at least formally, Catholics in second relationships. We exclude followers of Christ in other denominations. LGBTQI+ people feel very excluded. Mark's exasperation, placed on the lips of Jesus, is also directed to us: do you still not understand?