

Tuesday Reflection 3rd August 2021

The Gospel readings yesterday and today recount dramatic events. First of all, Jesus feeds the 5000+ who had come to hear Him, and then He not only calms the storm, but also walks on water - and saves an impetuous Simon Peter from drowning.

These dramatic accounts have both a prologue and an interlude, and it is on these that I would like to concentrate.

When Jesus heard of the murder of John the Baptist, “He withdrew into desert country to be alone “ - but the crowds followed Him “and He took pity on them”. Thus on this occasion He put the needs of others before His own.

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus dismissed the crowds and then “went up by himself on to the hillside, to pray there.”

There are, I think, two lessons that we could draw from these episodes. The first is that prayer is an essential part of life; if it was for Jesus, how much more must it be for us! The second, and connected with it, is the need for solitude, because it is when we are alone, free from the distractions provided by others, that we can be with God in a special way and be in the receptive frame that allows us to listen to him. It is Jesus himself who tells us (Matthew 6:6) “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

So prayer is something about communing with God, and has something to do with solitude. But what is it actually? Perhaps we can start by looking at what it is not. Here again, Jesus provides a guide: prayer is not a question of lots of words: “when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words”; neither is it about presenting God with a shopping list: “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Neither perhaps is it a case of trying to flatter God by telling Him how great He is.

So what is it? Perhaps we can explore this question further next week.

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