

Take-Home Sheet | Session 6

The Shepherd and the Bread (Mark 6)

A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

What We Found

One chapter, two banquets. At Herod's birthday feast, a king who admired John, feared him, and "heard him gladly" served the prophet's head on a platter rather than lose face over a rash oath, admiration without obedience curdling into complicity. St. Ambrose's verdict: a wicked promise must be broken, not kept. On the green grass, the other banquet: Jesus saw the crowd "as sheep without a shepherd" (Moses' phrase, Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel's promise, "I myself will be the shepherd," Ezekiel 34:15), made them lie down in green pastures like Psalm 23 come to life, and fed five thousand from five loaves, exceeding Elisha's greatest feeding (2 Kings 4:42-44) by orders of magnitude. Twelve baskets remained, long read as one per tribe.

We said the four verbs out loud: took, blessed, broke, gave. Keep them; this Gospel is not done with bread. On the way we also found the biblical root of a sacrament: the Twelve "anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (6:13), the practice the Church's Anointing of the Sick grows from (James 5:14-15; CCC 1511).

Then the sea: Jesus came treading the waves and "meant to pass by them", the technical language of theophany, God passing by Moses in the cleft of the rock and Elijah at Horeb, and Job's God who alone "trampled the waves of the sea." His greeting hid the burning bush in plain sight: "Take heart, *it is I*; have no fear." And Mark's verdict on the Twelve: "they did not understand about the loaves." Understand the loaves, and you know who walks the sea.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Tractates on the Gospel of John, on the feeding)

The multiplication of the loaves is nature unveiled, not violated: the same God who yearly multiplies a few grains into harvests did in his hands, swiftly and visibly, what he does in creation slowly and unseen. The miracle is a word as well as a work: it was done so we would ask what it means.

Voices of the Church: St. Ambrose of Milan (On the Duties of the Clergy, on Herod's oath)

It is sometimes contrary to duty to fulfill a promise: Herod's keeping of his rash vow, beheading a prophet to avoid embarrassment before dinner guests, made the oath the lesser sin and the keeping of it the greater. No one is bound by a promise to do evil.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the compassion of the Shepherd)

The Lord sees the crowd, is moved with compassion, and responds first by teaching, and only afterward by feeding. So Christ still deals with his flock: gathered first by the word, then nourished at the table. What Bede sees in the order of Mark 6, the Church would later name the one table of God's word and of Christ's body, from which she has always fed her children.

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, listen for the four verbs, took, blessed, broke, gave, and when you hear them, silently pray: "Lord, I want to understand about the loaves."
- Answer one impossible need with your actual loaves: give the small thing you have (an hour, a meal, a skill) to a need that dwarfs it, and let him do the multiplication.
- If someone you love is seriously ill or facing a serious operation, tell them about the Anointing of the Sick: it is not reserved to the dying (CCC 1514-1515), and Mark 6:13 shows its apostolic root.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Take heart, it is I; have no fear." (Mark 6:50, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 7:1-8:26. Watch where the bread travels next.

Catechism References

CCC 548-549, 1335, 1506-1509, 1511