

EVERYONE ATE AND WAS SATISFIED

When you are traveling alone, it is often not pleasant to go somewhere to eat by yourself. Then, eating is just eating. While you wait for the meal to arrive, you leaf through a travel guide or look at your phone. Meanwhile, you hear people around you talking and laughing. At those tables, eating is much more than just satisfying your hunger. It is togetherness. It is conviviality. It has a festive feel to it. That is why a communal meal is so often part of a wedding, an anniversary, or another family celebration.

Isaiah: Messianic Meal

We encounter the image of such a communal mealtime and again in the Bible. Today, too. Both the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel speak of it. Isaiah depicts an abundant feast for which no one needs to pay. It is an image of God's new world. Everyone is welcome. No one is excluded. No one lacks anything.

Gospel: like an ordinary meal

The Gospel, too, deals with a meal. It is striking that Matthew tells the story very simply. The people do not react with amazement, as is the case with many other miracle stories. Everything unfolds almost as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. Jesus takes the five loaves and the two fish. He looks up to heaven, says the prayer of blessing, and breaks the bread. These were the familiar gestures of every Jewish father. Before the meal, he thanked God for the bread, the gift of the Creator. Afterward, he broke the bread and distributed it. Then the meal could begin.

Gospel: messianic meal

Yet this is much more than an ordinary meal:

-The five loaves are reminiscent of the five books of the Law, the Torah. The two fish are reminiscent of the two stone tablets of the Law. The twelve baskets refer to the twelve tribes of Israel.

-The large crowd is also significant. Five thousand men, plus women and children. That evokes the image of all the people who will one day sit down at

God's feast. Jesus himself had already said: *many will come from the east and the west, and will recline at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt. 8:11).

-And then there is that abundance. There are even twelve baskets of bread left over. That, too, fits with God's new world, where no one lacks anything.

-Even the detail that the people sit down in the grass is significant. It brings to mind Psalm 23: *The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures he makes me lie down.*

Eucharistic Meal

But there is yet another layer in this Gospel. Anyone who listens closely will also hear the Eucharist resonating within it. Matthew writes: *He took the bread, looked up to heaven, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples.* These are almost the same words we hear in every Eucharistic celebration. Every Eucharist is a foreshadowing of the great feast that God prepares for all people.

A vertical and a horizontal movement

If we look closely at the Gospel again, two movements stand out. The first is a movement upwards. Jesus looks to heaven and thanks his Father. In doing so, He shows that everything begins with God. Everything we receive is ultimately a gift. Therefore, the Eucharist is primarily a thanksgiving.

But immediately afterwards follows a second movement: from above outwards, to the people. Jesus gives the loaves to his disciples. And the disciples distribute them to the crowd. That is actually very striking. Jesus could also have given the people food directly. But He does not. He enlists His disciples. He says: *give them some food yourselves.*

That was not only the case then. That is still the case today. The Lord places His gifts in human hands. He asks us to pass on what we ourselves have received. God's gifts are never intended solely for ourselves. They are given to us to share. And then the miracle of which today's gospel speaks happens: everyone ate and was satisfied.

Perhaps that is the most beautiful lesson of this gospel. Whoever lifts his eyes to God also gains eyes for the people around him. And whoever lifts his hands to God will also open them to his fellow man.