

THE BARLEY LOAVES

MARKUS VAN ALPHEN

St. John tells one of the most beautiful stories in the bible when he describes the situation when Jesus, upon looking up, sees a multitude of some five thousand. On asking how he and his disciples would feed this multitude, a lad produces five barley loaves and two fishes. This appears not only to be sufficient to saturate the multitude, but also to fill twelve baskets with leftovers.

St. John is known as one of the more mystically orientated writers, so the embellishments around the story should immediately attract our attention. Why some five thousand? Why five loaves and two fishes? Why barley loaves? Why the plural fishes in stead of fish? Why twelve baskets of bread left over? Why is no fish left over?

Of course, if we were to take only the literal meaning of the story, one could contend that the embellishments are necessary to illustrate the wonder of the miracle described. The more materialistically orientated masses of humankind might discard the entire story as being a physical impossibility. Or might, as is so often the case in the lore of many peoples ancient and modern, an inner truth be hidden in glyph and symbol behind the outer words?

In our carefully prepared Liturgy, our founding bishops chose portions of the scripture to be read as Epistles and Gospels, often together with a specific intention that is to receive our special attention in the period for which they are prescribed. Being visionary men in their time, surely their intention in prescribing this particular story for the Gospel on Refreshment Sunday goes deeper than illustrating the possibility of materialisation by those advanced enough to be able to harness the powers latent in nature?

The idea of a hidden meaning behind the Gospels is by no means new and many -inside and outside of the scope of influence of our church- even centuries ago, have reminded us of this fact. The late Rev. Hodson wrote a book on this subject and his treatment of the story of the prodigal son is noteworthy and important, especially for those holding wider views as our Church encourages them to do. He also tells us that each event may be interpreted in several layers.

So whilst not attempting to rob one of the wonder of materialisation, which even today is practised by people such as Sai Baba and would certainly have been in the power of a man of the advancement of Jesus, what might the deeper meaning of this particular story be? The obvious answer points in the direction of food as nourishment, therefore the bread might be seen as spiritual food. However, the choice of barley in stead of wheat makes interesting food for thought. Wheat, it is said, was one of the plants that was not as yet

present on our Earth when the Lords of Flame came from Venus to fill the then still vacant office of King of the World. This would be his gift, as also the bees, to the infant humankind placed in his care. Unleavened bread, made of wheat, has from time immemorial been the symbol of the highest spiritual substance: The Pesach bread, our wafer used in the Eucharist and apparently also the offer of the Mithraic, Egyptian and probably many other religions of old. The choice of unleavened bread as the oblation we offer at the Eucharist is, in this light, by no means arbitrary, as we offer in symbol the best and highest in ourselves.

Why then loaves of barley? A possible explanation might be found in the attempt at understanding how humanity comes to be and how it is brought to perfection. The general plan is that of evolution, where even this word should be qualified into its true meaning of gradual growth by adaptation. From nothing to perfection in one life does not seem reasonable to most of us and many of us therefore hold the laws of reincarnation and karma as being the process whereby the individual treads this path of unfoldment. But, in order to be able to incarnate, the necessary vehicles must be available. So we need to widen our view to include humanity as a whole. As humanity progresses collectively to greater heights in consciousness, the vehicles it uses need to be ever more refined. So also humanity as a whole and the vehicles put to its disposal are parts of the evolutionary plan.

We are told that seven root races are brought into existence, each following the previous one and each providing vehicles suitable to develop an aspect of consciousness in particular. The first two of these, as explained by people such as Leadbeater, Blavatsky and Bailey, amongst others, cannot really be thought of as actually incarnated – a watery kind of existence. The subsequent root races – Lemurian, Atlantean and Aryan – bring us to where humanity is today and the future sixth and seventh races are yet to appear to enable the mass of humanity to achieve perfection. In Lemurian times it was the physical and etheric consciousness that formed the particular field of endeavour, Atlantis the astral and the Aryan the mental consciousness. The final two races will have the intuitional and atomic consciousness as particular field of development. The above makes no value judgement about any of these races, as individuals are able to attain perfection at any stage, if they choose to and make the concerted effort required of them. Neither is it true that all aspects of a previous race have been perfected before a new race is born. As an example, the majority of the incarnated humanity is still wrestling with its astral consciousness, while simultaneously developing and making rapid advancement in mental consciousness. The path for the masses at large, however, is the treading of the path step by step and this is as valid a way to perfection as is the path of rapid achievement.

The multitude appearing before Jesus may be seen as the souls wishing to incarnate. With two fishes – the two watery root races, hence the plural fishes – and five barley loaves – the five incarnated root races making a total of seven – they can all be fed. This eating is again a mystical symbol, just as we do not eat the physical body of our Lord Christ at communion:

It is a partaking of the opportunities set before us. On gathering up the leftovers, twelve baskets are filled. Enough to ensure incarnated development over all twelve signs of the zodiac. The fact that they are gathered up points to the economy inherent in the laws of nature. Nothing is wasted. St. John does not continue and tell us what is done with the leftovers, leading one to the conclusion that the leftovers were actually not left over at all, but indeed necessary to complete the task of feeding the multitude. The corollary of this is that all that is manifested is also necessary.

What does this then have to do with Refreshment Sunday and its intention of spiritual refreshment? Easter is getting closer and by seeing the great plan, which in itself is perfect, gives us the strength to persevere. It also places our efforts into perspective: The achievement of one individual is important as it brings humanity as a whole one step closer to its goal. The individual making the step symbolised by Easter realises that it is not taken for the individual glory but is merely another fragment dedicated to the purpose of larger whole. Refreshment implies that we see things in their true perspective and with clear and open eyes make the steps required of us.

In serving humanity we realise how everything is interwoven with everything; the earth and all its kingdoms of nature; the angelic kingdom; the solar system and the universe. Our personal circumstances are a mirror for the possibilities as regards our individual growth, yet this growth becomes ever less the aim of our endeavour. It is of our own free will and in our choice that we may be servers of God through humanity: "We know that we serve him best, when best we serve our brother man."