
The Gospel and numbers. Romeo (Tg2): “God extends beyond our computation skills”

'One' and 'three' are the most frequently recurring numbers in the Gospels, while five and 153 recur only once. One as the mustard seed presented in the parable, three as the number of the trinity. Five, the hour when the last worker is called to the vineyard, 153 as the fish caught by Simon Peter. In his book *"Le tabelline di Dio – Piccole nozioni di matematica evangelica, Ancora - (The timetable of God - Small notions of evangelical mathematics. Trans.'s note.)*, **Enzo Romeo**, Vatican journalist, editor-in-chief of TG2 News-RAI, proposes a journey into the theology of numbers, featuring remarkable illustrations by **Don Giovanni Berti**, AKA *Gioba*. In the book, the author delves into Gospels passages featuring numbers from 1 to 153. For each passage, the journalist presents the context of the events that led the Evangelists to associate numbers with Jesus' deeds and words. On the axis from one to nine, for example, the author recalls the episode of the ten lepers healed by Jesus (Lk 17:11-19): only one returns to thank him, while the remaining nine don't, whence Romeo develops his reflection on the imbalance between the many petitions of intercession that are often recited in times of need and the few prayers of thanksgiving that are offered when difficult circumstances are overcome. **What inspired you to write this book?** It was my personal longing to draw closer to the Gospel, to read a passage from time to time. That's what I tried to do. But we all need stimuli and I sought them in the one thing that is most challenging to me, that is, numbers. I'm terribly bad at maths. Sometimes when you don't know things, you become more curious. So I searched for numbers in the Gospel to see what Jesus was saying to me through that number found in the verses of the four Gospels. I elaborated a reflection on those passages that contain them and tried to imagine them in the light of current events. I tried to deepen the understanding of a specific description of a place, event, or character. One number after another, it gradually developed into this collection of small reflections.



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God always extends way beyond our computation skills. *We can try to compute our life, every single thing, but God always has an additional number.* There is a risk of limiting ourselves to a human mindset based on precise calculations. This is especially evident today with the coronavirus problem. We are living with this tragic count of infected people who are dying. But we don't have to stop there. God's timetables rise beyond us. And that's a beautiful thing: *With God 'two plus two' is not always four.* It could add up to five, six, one thousand. Although it may seem a mistake, the truth is that it is only from that perspective that the figures always add up. Otherwise we will always struggle to square the circle. In fact, in the

preface, Dom Jacques Dupont says that perhaps God knows how to count to one because we are all unique to Him or that He only knows how to multiply, because He multiplies His love. What do you mean by “With the Lord the numbers never add up”? That is seemingly how things stand, the numbers ultimately always add up. They appear not to add up and it's the word of the Gospel. There are many passages that testify to this, such as the story of the widow who makes her offering with the two coins that are worth almost nothing on the human level. In reality, she is offering everything. That's why our calculations wouldn't add up, while they do in the eyes of God. Another episode is that of the winemakers called by the master to work the vineyard. Finally, the last one who only worked an hour receives the same pay as the first one. For us, this too is wrong from a mathematical and economic perspective, but from God's point of view it is the way to make ends meet. Is there also a form of justice that can be drawn from the numbers in the Gospel? Justice is precisely this act of transcending the human perspective, which could even see it as injustice. *We would like everything to be precise in the ledger of life. Instead, sometimes God places everything off the established course.* Therein lies His justice which we must, however, recognize. We must be good at learning this kind of math. Is that the message to the reader? If we try to see things through the lenses of the Gospel we will find the solution to everything. Especially at this time of anguish and fear. Viewing reality from this perspective derived from the Gospel will surely help us to face things in a different way. With a computing approach that is different from the one we are accustomed to, different from human, utilitarian calculations that are constrained into a 'do ut des' perspective, on how many days our life must have and how beautiful it must be, only to discover that one day is sometimes worth more than a thousand years. I believe that viewing everything from that perspective, from that vantage point, is a valuable resource.

Filippo Passantino