

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**The Fourth Sunday in Lent (2022)**

**What the Christian Lacks, He Receives from Christ**

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*“Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”” (John 6:4–9, ESV)*

The words of the Collect this morning give us great comfort. *“Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.”*

Indeed, His mercies are new every morning as He fulfills the needs of our body and soul through the merciful gift of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ whose suffering and death upon the Altar of the Cross won and purchased us from sin, death, and the devil. Through the gift of faith He leads us to receive His gracious gift of the new manna from heaven, His Son’s body and blood given and shed for us to eat and drink that we may receive life, forgiveness, and salvation, thereby entering the new Israel and receiving eternal life.

Today is “Laetare” Sunday, that Sunday in Lent marking the half-way point of the Lenten Season. In the middle of our fast, it is an oasis of comfort. It is a day to **“Rejoice,”** The opening words of the Introit point us to that rejoicing, saying: **“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;” (Isaiah 66:10, ESV)** Truly, this is a day of rejoicing as we ponder the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and see Christ, the Good Shepherd who knows how to feed His own with miraculous food - food that sustains faith in Him and His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Food that grants us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Holy Scripture gives us numerous examples of God miraculously providing His people with the necessities of life, even when they grumble against Him, such as we read about in the OT reading for today. In the midst of their anger against Moses and Aaron, God answers the cries of His people, providing them with meat to eat, the quail that came up in the evening, and bread to eat, the manna that came from heaven. This was a miracle from God, one that sustained His people in the wilderness and one that points us to the miraculous feeding of the five thousand spoken of in the Gospel Reading for today. This blessed feeding of the five thousand is a clear sign that *What the Christian Lacks, He Can Receive from Christ.*

St. John tells us, **“Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” (John 6:4, ESV)** Jesus had traveled across the Sea of Galilee to a wilderness spot, followed there by a large crowd who had witnessed the signs of Jesus healing the sick. The Synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus had

compassion on the crowd and He began to heal their sick and teach them many things. As evening drew near, He sat down and had His disciples do the same. Looking at the crowd, He turned to St. Philip, and testing him, asked, ***“Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”*** (John 6:5, *ESV*) Notice, our Lord does not ask, “Where are we to buy *food*,” but rather, ***“Where are we to buy BREAD.”*** This is significant for the entire discourse of the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, for this discourse confesses Jesus to be the Bread of Life.

Jesus, His disciples, and the crowd are in the *wilderness* far from any town or village, far from any inn where they may buy food. So when Jesus asks, ***“from where are we to buy bread?”*** He knew beforehand what He was going to do. We cannot help but see a Christological connection here, one pointing to the truth that Jesus Himself will provide the bread by being the *Bread* that came down from heaven. Moreover, we cannot help but see the Passover meal of the Last Supper, for there Jesus will be both host and food, bread, and wine. Acting in accordance with the OT example, God providing the Israelites with food in the wilderness, Jesus will provide the crowd with food necessary to fulfill their hunger. In so doing, He will reveal the truth of who He is, both to His disciples and to the crowd. Reminding us of what God said to His people when He fed them in the wilderness; ***“Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”*** (Exodus 16:12, *ESV*)

St. Philip has no clue from where the ***“bread”*** will come. He says to Jesus, ***“Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”*** (John 6:7, *ESV*) Philip is wedded to worldly things, forgetting in who’s presence he is. Had he not seen Jesus heal the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the mute? Had he not witnessed the miracle at Cana? Yes, he had, and according to St. John after having witnessed the manifestation of Christ’s glory, the disciples believed in Christ. This Jesus was more than a mere man. But obviously Philip had forgotten, or he simply couldn’t connect those events with the feeding that needed to take place.

St. John tells us that St. Andrew brought forth a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but asked, ***“but what are they for so many?”*** (John 6:9, *ESV*) Another disciple with less than a complete understanding of who Jesus is. Yet the questions of these disciples would soon be answered in a most miraculous way. Jesus tells His disciples to have the people sit down and taking the bread He gives thanks and distributes it to the people. St. Luke tells us Jesus took, ***“the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”*** (Luke 9:16–17, *ESV*) St. John explains it this way, ***“Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.”*** (John 6:11, *ESV*) Jesus gave thanks and then distributed. We give thanks in the Sanctus and then gratefully receive what He distributes, His body and His blood. In our reception of the food given us in the Lord’s Supper, we are privileged to be in communion with those who were on the mountain, for we too are in the presence of the Lord.

The feeding of the five thousand is symbolic of the paschal meal. This miraculous meal, which was presented at our Lord’s last Passover, the day before our Lord’s crucifixion. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who, like the paschal lamb, gives His life in sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, the feeding of the five thousand is a sign pointing back to the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, and a sign that points forward to the final Passover of our Lord Jesus, which culminates in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God given to sinners in the Christian Passover meal, the holy Eucharist.

Our Lord feeds five thousand men, not counting the women and children, with just five barley loaves and two little fish. Five thousand with so little! Now, if I came in and told you I feed a

football team with one loaf of bread and a package of baloney, you would say I am trying to hand you a bunch of baloney. Such a feeding in our minds is impossible. Yet all the evangelist of the NT make this claim about the Christ, He fed five thousand men with just five barley loaves of bread and two little fish.

Of course you would reject my claim out of hand because I am not the Incarnate Son of God, and you accept Scripture's account because it is the inspired Word of God. However, there are many who say they believe in the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Holy Scripture and find no problem believing the account of the feeding of the five thousand but completely fail to see a connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of countless of billions of baptized Christians ever since our Lord inaugurated the Lord's Supper on the night He was betrayed. There is no way, they insist that our Lord's words of institution are meant to be taken literally. They say His words are meaningless when He took bread and broke it, gave thanks, giving it to His disciples saying, "**Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.**" (Matt. 26:26; Like 22:19) Then, taking a cup and having given thanks, He said, "**Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**" (Matthew 26:27–28, *ESV*) They say these words must be understood metaphorically. Thus, they can have no connection to the feeding of the five thousand. To those such as these, our Lord says, "Oh you of little faith."

The connection is clear from the remaining discourse of the sixth chapter of John's gospel.

When the Jews asked our Lord Jesus to provide a sign proving who He was, reminding Him that their forefathers had eaten manna, that is bread from heaven given to them by Moses in the wilderness, thus implying that God had sent Moses. Therefore, they ask, Jesus, what sign do you give? How can you prove that you are sent from God? Jesus responds, saying, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" (John 6:32–33, *ESV*) Jesus now connects the "bread" of verse 5, the bread of the feeding of the five thousand, with Himself as the "bread," saying, "**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**" (John 6:35, *ESV*) As God sent bread (manna) from heaven in the wilderness to feed His people, He sent His only begotten Son from heaven to be the bread of life for sinful man. Bread that brings life-saving forgiveness.

But those who deny the words of institution at the Last Supper, which clearly say our Lord's body and blood are in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion, they are like the Jews who grumbled because He said, "**I am the bread that came down from heaven.**" (John 6:41, *ESV*) But just as God would not have the Israelites grumble in the wilderness, Jesus tells these Jews, "**Do not grumble among yourselves . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**" (John 6:43, 47–51, *ESV*) "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.**" (John 6:43, 47-51, 53–58, *ESV*)

Powerful words from the Incarnate Son of God. Words which are to be believed, not grumbled over. But this was the major issue of the Reformation between Luther and Zwingli and later with the Reformed. The words Christ spoke to His disciples at His last Passover Meal concerning the bread and the wine are merely metaphor according to the Reformed. They are not to be taken literally. They are not to be believed. Furthermore, they insist that if someone takes them literally, then like the Jews, you are to grumble against them and cast them out. But should this surprise you? St. John reminds us that Jesus heard the grumbling, writing, ***“Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?” (John 6:61, ESV) Many did, saying, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60, ESV) Then St. John tells us, “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” (John 6:66, ESV) Like these disciples, many today say let us not believe the words of Jesus, they are too hard to understand. How many today ask is it possible for Christ to give us His body and blood? They forget who He is, the Incarnate Son of God, the Word which caused creation to come into being. But still they insist, He can’t make Himself present in the Holy Eucharist. Let us always consider, “the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:24–25, ESV) “With God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26, ESV)***

As I said earlier, today is the Sunday marking the half-way point in the Lenten Season. As we continue our walk with Christ to Jerusalem and His appointment with the Cross, we pray that our heavenly Father would keep us steadfast in the faith knowing that the culmination of our Lord’s ministry on earth was on the Altar of the Cross. There He shed His blood and gave His life for the forgiveness of our sins, reconciling us with God. Moreover, He reminds us of His sacrifice every Lord’s Day in the Sacrament of Altar where we are blessed to receive the very body and blood that was given and shed for us on the Altar of Cross. In the Holy Eucharist we are blessed to be brought into full communion with our Lord.

Those who were fed from the five barley loaves and two little fish, they did not grumble. No, to the contrary, as recipients of that miraculous feeding, they were grateful. So grateful, they wanted to make Jesus, king. We, today, who are recipients of this blessed and holy meal are also grateful, but rather than make Him king, we recognize Him for who He is, the King of kings.

Our gratitude is for what He does for us as guests at His Table – the Sacrament of the Altar - wherein He grants us a more privileged position than those He fed on the mountain. He gives us the unique privilege to participate in the Last Supper, which holds true for every celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Therein the true presence of Jesus’ body and blood is offered and given to you. It is the meal whereby He bridges the gap between heaven and earth, coming to you, giving Himself to you for the forgiveness of your sins, bringing to you, eternal life. Holy Communion in the Divine Service holds the promise of your future eating and drinking when the kingdom of God fully arrives at the second coming. Then, like the penitent thief, you will be with Jesus in Paradise, seated with Him at His Table in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

Bread and fish in the feeding of the five thousand, are primary symbols pointing to the primary elements of the Eucharist, bread and wine, body and blood, the promised elements given to every believer for the forgiveness of their sins, declaring that *What the Christian Lacks, He can Receive from Christ, forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.* In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.