

*Whence may we buy bread that these may eat?*

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On this Rose, or Laetere Sunday, we find a break from the heavy lessons of Jesus battling and defeating the demonic and we pray for relief. We acknowledge that because of our sinfulness and our evil deeds we deserve to be punished, and yet we ask for mercy and relief, lest we forget that Jesus not only can heal the deaf and mute, not only can he cast out demons, but He cares for our every need. The faith in Jesus Christ to provide for our every need requires trust. This makes our Lord's statement in this Gospel, right before the miraculous feeding of the five thousand all the more remarkable. *Whence may we buy bread that these may eat?*

Blessed John Keble, the great English priest who started the Catholic Revival, or the Oxford movement, in the Church of England, puts our Lord's question into perspective. *Think for a moment, my brethren, Who asked this question. It was the Creator of Heaven and earth, the Maker and Provider both of all food that is eaten, and of all who are nourished by food. He gave His blessing in the first place to the earth, that it should have power and virtue to bring forth what might nourish and sustain life. Every hour He continues that blessing, not only to the great world altogether, but to each little insect and blade of grass; He cares and provides for each one as perfectly as if there were only that one to be cared and provided for.* The Lord, Jesus Christ, the creator and sustainer of all, had spent the day teaching on the mountainside and a great multitude of people had come out to hear Him. They followed Him out into the wilderness, and He shows His concern for their souls and their physical bodies by asking His disciples where they may *buy bread that these may eat*. But He asks this question, *to prove His disciples* and to test their trust in Him.

The disciples observe that two hundred denarii could not buy enough bread for so many, but even if they had the money they could not have bought that much bread at the nearest village. St. Andrew comes to Jesus and says, we have a young boy here *who has two small fish and five barley loaves*. A simple meal, nothing much, nothing to be proud of, a meal that denoted a poor family. And yet Andrew asks, *but what are these among so many?* Hundreds of years before, the prophet Elisha's servant when presented with a similar situation and a similar miracle of twenty barley loaves, had asked *how can I set this before a hundred men?* In both cases we see that the little offering trustingly placed in God's hands can be made to do great and wonderful things. Elisha's twenty barley loaves feeds one hundred men with plenty left over. This miracle from the Old Testament foreshadows Jesus miracle which we focus on today. The five barley loaves and two fish which

belonged to Andrew's little friend feeds the five thousand until they are full, with twelve baskets left over.

God consistently shows us throughout the Scriptures that He can feed us, that He cares not just for our souls but for our physical bodies too. We remember the story of the Exodus where the Israelites complained of their overwhelming hunger and God rains down manna, bread from heaven, on them. God taught the Israelites a lesson in trust and faith by only allowing them to gather enough for the day, to gather their daily bread, and not to store up any for the next day. Whatever they tried to gather for the next day rotted unless it was for the Sabbath. God was merciful too when the Israelites complained about only eating manna in the wilderness and fed them with quail. But God did not just feed the Israelites in the Exodus, he fed the crowd of one hundred by multiplying barley loaves through Elisha the prophet, He fed Elijah the prophet with bread daily by a raven, and once by bread prepared for him by an angel, Elijah also saw the widow's cruse of oil never run dry, and another widow's meal barrel never empty. All of these miracles that had come before had provided food for the Israelites only, yet today Jesus feeds the five thousand in the land of Galilee, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood with plenty of Gentile neighbors. Through this miracle Jesus shows both Jew and Gentile exactly who He is, again, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Maker of heaven and earth.

Jesus feeds Jew and Gentile making it clear that His provision for us is not dependent upon hereditary pedigrees. As the baptized children of God, we are *children of the free* and our Heavenly Father cares about our souls and our bodies, for our spiritual and physical food. His desire is that we learn to place all of our faith and trust in Him. He wants us to give freely to Him, our barley loaves and our fish, *our selves, our souls, and bodies*, our families, our friends, our work, and our play, regardless of how valuable or common we may think they are. For the smallest and seemingly most insignificant things become great only when they are placed in God's hands. May we be inspired this Lent to place every aspect of our lives in God's hands, realizing that we are dependent totally and completely on Him spiritually and physically. And in turn, we draw near to His altar to receive a better bread, better than the manna from heaven, better than the bread that He multiplied on the hillside in Galilee, bread broken and multiplied, the bread of His own body for our spiritual benefit and physical healing. Amen.