

**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, (Laetare) (2021)**

**The Lacking Christian**

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***“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.”” (John 6:5–7, ESV)***

What a wonderful Gospel Reading to keep us mindful of the season of Lent. The miracle recorded in the Gospel Reading for today is the only miracle our Lord performed which is recorded in all four gospels, which speaks of its significance for the Church and for our faith.

St. John begins by explaining the importance of this miracle through two vivid pictures. First, in the prefiguration of Christ through a Christological summary of the Exodus, and secondly, by reminding us that God fed His people with manna in the wilderness and now He feeds us His Son, the Bread from heaven. Thus, we pray that the Holy Spirit would open our hearts and minds in this Gospel to see how God desires to love us and forgive us through the life, death, and resurrection of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

St. John reminds his readers that, ***“The Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” (John 6:4, ESV)*** This was the event in ancient Egypt which allowed the Jews, who were made up of a large crowd, to leave Egypt by crossing the Red Sea and follow Moses to a mountain, Mt. Sinai. The apostle John writes, ***“After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.” (John 6:1–3, ESV)*** The Jews in Egypt had seen the ***“signs”*** of God and followed Moses. The Jews of Judea had seen the ***“signs”*** of Jesus, and thus they followed Him. The connection is too clear to ignore. Here, on this mountain in Galilee, is the Lamb of God feeding His people just as His Father had fed them in the wilderness. But the feeding of bread and fish to these, 5,000 plus is but a prelude to the Eucharistic discourse which closely follows. The discourse on our Lord Jesus being the ***“Bread of Life.”***

This great crowd had followed Jesus to a mountain somewhere on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Their journey had been lengthy, consuming much of the day, and according to the synoptics, the day was drawing to a close and the people were hungry. Seeing them, Jesus turns to Philip and asks, ***“Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (v. 5)*** Thus, begins the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

Just as the people in the wilderness were hungry, so, too, are those who have followed Jesus all day. Just as God did in the wilderness with manna, here on this mountain Jesus feeds the people with bread and fish to satisfy their hunger and sustain their strength. But this miraculous feeding is often mistaken by some who follow Christ, believing that if they follow Him, they will lack for nothing. This is a dangerous assumption.

Christians often lack many of life’s necessities. They are not set free from the ravages of the world. Famine brings starvation even to Christians. Drought attacks the Christian farmer just as it

attacks the non-Christian. A Christ loving mother grieves at the death of a beloved child. Christian homes and houses of worship are not safe from tornadoes. “Black sheep” can be found in the most pious of Christian households. Persecution, disease, tragedy, from such as these, the Christian is not exempt. So, just as the 5,000 who followed Jesus to the mountain lacked food, and just as God’s children in the past lacked daily necessities, we, too, are not immune from the scarcity of life’s necessities. Yet, in the face of deficiency and want, the Christian is not anxious.

God has not changed. He promises to care for us. Out of His compassionate heart, even if He must perform a miracle, He keeps His promise. He promises to be our Keeper, to be our Shepherd, to be our guide. He promises to be with us, never forgetting us, assuring us that whatever happens it is always intended for our good. Although we may lack certain essentials of life, He is always with us, assuring us that we are being held in His loving arms, awaiting His loving call to be with Him for all eternity in His heavenly home which lacks for nothing. This is the loving care that is given to the 5,000 on the mountain. God’s Son will perform a miracle staving off their hunger.

The feeding of the 5,000 is important because it displays the power and authority of the Son of God, testifying to His divinity. Only the Son of God could perform such a miracle. Indeed, **“When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’” (John 6:14, ESV)** He who took five barley loaves and two little fish and fed 5,000 men, not including the women and children, is the promised Messiah.

But this feeding of the 5,000 is also the prelude to the one of the most important discourses, one of the most important theological proofs in Holy Scripture, the discourse on Jesus being the “Bread of Life.” Indeed, it leads to those passages where Christ speaks of the importance of eating the flesh of the Son of Man and the drinking of His blood, an eating and drinking which gives forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

As I said earlier, the feeding of the 5,000 is a vivid reminder of the paschal meal. St. John begins the record of this event reminding his readers that the Passover was near, raising in us a significant theological clue. Pointing to the fact that the feeding of the 5,000 cannot be dissociated from Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. At the first Passover a lamb without blemish in each household was sacrificed and its blood was painted on the doorposts of the homes of the Hebrews, saving them from the angel of death. Now, the feeding of the multitude foretells of another Passover, one which is established in the death of the Lamb of God, who’s body and blood are given to sinners in the Christian Passover meal, the Eucharist, saving them from an eternal death in hell. The eating of barley loaves and fish, which was an actual eating, leads directly to the actual eating and drinking of the true body and blood of Christ Jesus in an under the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Just as the “*signs*” of God through Moses pointed to God’s redemption of Israel. Feeding the 5,000 with five barley loaves and two little fish was a “*sign*” pointing to the Christians redemption from their bondage to sin, death, and the devil. The “*signs*” of God point backward to previous redemptive events and forward to greater and more complete redemptive events. Thus, the “*sign*” of manna in the desert provided the people with real food, while the “*sign*” in the Gospel Reading for today is the new Manna from heaven, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who will also be eaten as real food.

In our text Jesus asks Philip, **“Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (v. 5)** Obviously, this was a rhetorical question. Our Lord knew from where the bread would come. He knew beforehand how He was going to feed the people. Yet, to this day, there are many who

do not understand how the true body and blood of Christ can be present in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. This comes from a failure to rightly understand God's Word of Holy Scripture.

As we see in today's Gospel Reading, Philip had no idea that Christ would work a miracle. He was thinking fleshly not spiritually. He answers Jesus' question, saying, ***"Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."*** (v. 7) His response says even if they had two hundred denarii it would only give the meagerest bite to each person. Certainly not enough to satisfy their hunger. Philip's thinking is not unlike many today who fail to rightly understand the miracle of Christ in the Eucharist.

Some, who see the miracle in the feeding of the 5,000 refuse to see the miracle in the Lord's Supper where Christ feeds us His body and blood. Driven by man's faulty reason, many believe that they do not receive the true body and blood of Jesus through a physical eating, but only through faith. Furthermore, they insist that believing in a bodily eating of Christ in the Sacrament adds nothing to the believer. In fact, they insist that believing in a bodily eating actually corrupts the purity of faith. Therefore, they teach that Christ is present in the Sacrament only mentally or spiritually.

Such reasoning does not allow them to discern the body of Christ in the Eucharist, thus placing themselves in danger of condemnation. St. Paul asks the Corinthian church, ***"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"*** (1 Corinthians 10:16, ESV) No doubt the apostle believed any who received the bread and wine of holy communion also received the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus. Then he warns them, ***"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."*** (1 Corinthians 11:27–29, ESV)

Famines, droughts, fires, tornadoes, floods, illness, and starvation. Let them all come, but we pray, do not deprive us of that which Your Son gave us, His body and blood in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus said, ***"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."*** (John 6:53–56, ESV) Moreover, on the mountain our Lord took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed the bread. At the Last Supper He did the same. St. Matthew tells us, ***"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "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 26:26–28, ESV) However, instead of taking from the word of Christ what He truly said regarding this sacrament, those who refuse to discern the body and blood of Jesus in and under the bread and wine of holy communion, read their own thoughts and desires into the words of Jesus and become partners with those of whom St. John writes, ***"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? . . . The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe."*** (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) . . . ***After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."*** (John 6:60-61 63-64, 66, ESV)

Those who refuse to believe in the true body and blood in and under the bread and wine of holy communion are truly *Lacking Christians*. Their unbelief robs them of one of the most precious gifts God has given His church, the true body and blood of His Son Jesus, given and shed for the forgiveness of sin.

As the 5,000 were filled with the distribution of five barley loaves and two little fish, believers in Christ for all time are filled each Lord's day when the pastor distributes the body and blood of Jesus in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Each of you, as you come forward to the Altar Rail, kneel to partake in this holy meal, come face-to-face with Jesus as you receive His true body and His true blood, that body and blood sacrificed on the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of your sins. You who were born alien to God, who are undeserving of the sacrificial, atoning death of our Lord Jesus, are given His true and precious body and blood, not only as a reminder of His death for your salvation, but as a true means of forgiveness, as a physical Gospel reminder you that the only begotten Son of God willingly gave His life upon the Altar of the Cross for your forgiveness. You are receiving the body and blood which redeemed you, a poor miserable sinner. You are receiving the body and blood which won your victory over sin, death, and the devil, and thereby opened God's heart to cover you with His Son's righteousness.

What a glorious miracle this is. Today, and every day of your life as you walk in the light of Christ you will never lack His love, His mercy, or His grace for He feeds you Himself, the Bread of Life at His Altar rail. Having fed on Him who saved you, having witnessed the "*sign*" from heaven firsthand, you can now say with the people, "***This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!***" (*John 6:14, ESV*) and now having fed on Him, I am *lacking nothing*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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