

**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**

**Seventh Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**Christ' Compassion Feeds the Hungry Soul**

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***“In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.” (Mark 8:1–2, ESV)***

The account of the feeding of the four thousand is remarkably like the feeding of the five thousand, that which is recorded in all four Gospels. One of the similarities we notice is that of the lack of faith of the apostles, which is quite extraordinary considering they had already witnessed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. Perhaps it is because of that which is not the same. The feeding of the four thousand, which is recorded only in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, points out a striking difference, those who are the recipients of this miraculous meal, for the most part are not Jews, they are Gentiles. Thus, when they ask, ***“How can one feed these people?” (Mark 8:4, ESV)*** perhaps they are referring to the Gentile crowd. How can we Jews have table fellowship with those who are not Jews? Separation from the unclean was of great concern for the Jew.

However, despite this difference, St. Mark, and St. Matthew both tell us that these two miraculous feedings are distributed to very large crowds among whom are sick, lame, blind, and crippled people. In each account, Jesus pours out His compassion on them, healing them and feeding them. Healing the sick at the feeding of the four thousand, St. Matthew tells us, ***“The crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.” (Matthew 15:31, ESV)***

Now at a first reading one might not be impressed by this statement, asking, who wouldn't have wondered if they had witnessed such healings? But a closer read shows that we should not focus on the wonderment of the crowd but rather on the confession of the crowd. Expressing their amazement, the crowd: ***“glorified the God of Israel.” (Matthew 15:31, ESV)*** This is a significant statement by *this* crowd of mostly Gentiles. Unlike the crowd in the feeding of the five thousand, who were primarily Jews from Capernaum and surrounding towns, the crowd of the four thousand are mostly Gentiles from the area of the Decapolis. Gentiles who normally would not praise the God of Israel. But because of our Lord's compassion they do. This should not surprise us, for this is who our Lord is: our compassionate God.

As He did for the Hebrews in the wilderness, providing them manna to eat, Israel's God has come down once again to provide for a needy and unworthy people in the wilderness. Here, in a desolate location on the southeast side of the sea of Galilee, Jesus provides comfort, healing, and food for a very large crowd with just a few loaves of bread and an even smaller number of fish. Our Lord provides a banquet for those who believe in Him, both Jews and Gentiles. Each of these two miraculous feedings point us directly to the inexhaustible feast that our Lord provides His flock on every Lord's Day. These miraculous feedings point us to our Lord's blessed Supper where He is both host and food. In His blessed Eucharistic feast of the Lord's Supper, He feeds us His body and blood in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Thereby He heals the greatest infirmity known to man, our sin. In His consecrated and blessed feast, we are forgiven our sins as we partake of His crucified body and blood. Like the crowd who ***“glorified***

*the God of Israel,*” we joyfully sing, “*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Your glory,*” thereby recognizing who has come among us, claiming us as His own, and declaring us forgiven children of His. Every Lord’s Day we are blessed to receive what the crowds near Capernaum and in the Decapolis received, the nearness of Christ and inexhaustible feast prepared by our Lord.

However, too many see Divine Service and the liturgy as merely means for barter. Too often people’s sinful desires are exposed as they seek worship that entertains rather than forgives. But this misses the mark when one considers the rich repast and gifts offered by Christ in the Divine Service. When people come hoping to “get something” from Divine Service, such as forgiveness, life, and salvation, in exchange for their prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, they only fool themselves, and sadly leave Divine Service empty of the gifts Christ desired to give them. Forgiveness and salvation are not offered as an exchange for our works, but as an exchange for Christ’s work. He exchanged our condemnation for His justification on the Altar of the Cross and He willingly, and freely, offers His gift of life and salvation to all.

Jesus once said, “***I am among you as the one who serves.***” (*Luke 22:27, ESV*) Although these words of Christ were uttered at the Last Supper, they must not be taken as a one-time event. Instead, when He says, “***I am among you***” He is unveiling the hidden reality of every Lord’s Supper. There, at that blessed meal, He is among us! We need not falsely believe that we stand before the presence of Jesus during worship because somehow our soul magically wings it way to heaven, as some do. No, Jesus is adamant, He comes to be with us! He comes to serve us. Because He is omnipresent, He can and is with us during the Divine Service. This is why we prepare ourselves to be in His presence through confession and absolution. His words at the Last Supper are sacramental language. The “*real presence*” of His body and blood are not separated from His person. Thus, on each Lord’s Day, as we worship, He comes among us, to be with us, to offer us His gifts of forgiveness and salvation as He serves us through the sacramental parts of the liturgy, including His feeding us His body and His blood in Holy Communion. Like the people in the wilderness, every Lord’s Day we find ourselves in His presence, being fed both Word and Sacrament by Him.

Moreover, we’re reminded that at His ascension He promised, “***Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***” (*Matthew 28:20, ESV*) This promise of Christ is fulfilled as we hold fast to what He has taught us, teaching it to others. His promise is fulfilled in the Sacramental gifts of the Church: Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution.

In the blessed waters of Baptism we become recipients of the full blessings of our Holy, Triune God. God Himself comes to us and is active in our Baptism, forgiving our sins and adopting us to be His children. St. Paul reminds us, that in our Baptism we were buried with Christ, into His death, that by the glory of God we may be raised from the dead with Christ so we may walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4.) We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives faith, and we are robed in the righteousness of Christ. Thus, as a baptized child of God, Christ is always present in us, and we are always in Him.

As we come to the Altar rail to receive the true body and blood of Jesus, Christ fulfills His promise to be with us until the end of the age. In the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion, Christ comes to us giving us His body and His blood offered on the Altar of the Cross in and under bread and wine to be eaten and drank for the forgiveness of our sins. In this blessed Eucharist, our Lord does more for us than He did for the four thousand. In the Eucharist He feeds us the bread of life, the living bread that came down from heaven (John 6:47, 51, ESV), His flesh, and He gives us His precious blood to drink so that we may abide in Him and He in us and have eternal life. (John 6: 47, 56, ESV)

Furthermore, at the beginning of Divine Service you hear the pastor say to you, “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins.” Christ, who is present in His pastor, comes to you and speaks to you through His pastoral servant assuring you of your forgiveness, welcoming you into His presence.

Wow! Look at the many ways our Lord Jesus comes to be with us, to feed us His blessings through Word and Sacrament. Thus, like the people of the Decapolis, we too declare the glory of our Lord in the words of the *Thanksgiving*, “*O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever.*”

Therefore, like the people He was with, those He fed on the mountains, we know He is with us for we hear Him, and we see Him come to us through the teaching of His blessed Word. Therein, He shouts out warnings of the Law: don’t think you’re bigger than me! Don’t think as a pupil you are cleverer than the I! Look at the Ten Commandments, have you failed to fulfill them? Thus, He points out our sin through His preaching of the Law. But He doesn’t leave us there. He doesn’t let us wallow in our own despair. No, after having made us aware of our sin, He proscribes the remedy: the Gospel which speaks of His forgiveness. Thus, it is through the preaching of His Word and the distribution of His holy Sacraments that Christ comes to us, preparing us to receive another feeding, one that is divine, one that is inexhaustible: the sumptuous feast of His body and blood in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

It is good, right, and salutary that we give thanks for the presence of Christ in the Divine Service, for therein He grants us His personal intimacy. The liturgy is more than informational, it is about Christ coming to us, it is personal as He delivers His promises to the us: Absolution, the Reading of the Scriptures, the Preaching of God’s Word in its truth and purity, the Distribution, and finally the Benediction. These are Christ’s sacramental gifts to you. Through these means He moves the hearts of men to repentance, confession, faith, and reconciliation with God and thereby prepares you to meet Him in His Supper. All this occurs in the liturgy of Divine Service where we live in the reality of heaven on earth.

As the crowds followed Him up the mountain, we follow Him to where He calls us, His Father’s house. He invites us who bear His family name into His house where holiness reigns. On every Lord’s Day our Lord Jesus comes to be with us, as His worship space is filled with His people: those on earth and all those who have gone before us, those who are now in heaven. Therefore, together, with angels and archangels we all stand in the presence of Christ, that through Word and Sacrament our Lord heals us of our sin and feeds us the one, holy, divine meal which leads to eternal life: His blessed Eucharist.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds, healing their infirmities and feeding them and He also has compassion on us, poor miserable sinners, offering us what we so dearly need, *His Compassion as He Heals and Feeds our Sick and Hungry Soul.*

How blessed we are, but there are many in the world who do not know this truth. Many who do not know Jesus and His presence among us. Such as these are starving, devoid of Christ and His blessed sacramental gifts. Our Lord Jesus had told you, to love your neighbor as yourself, I ask you, is there a greater love than one who saves the life of a neighbor? Is there a greater love than one who points His neighbor to the One who gives eternal life? No, there isn’t. So, having been fed by Christ, having been forgiven and promised eternal life, having been blessed to be in the presence of Christ, go and invite your neighbor to share with you the great blessings of being in the presence of Christ. Invite them to Divine Service. Invite them to the mountain where they can be fed by the Incarnate God, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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