

**LAETARE / THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

Text: St. John 6:1-15

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*“And JESUS took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to the disciples....”* When I hear these words, it is hard not to think of similar words which we will shortly hear, *“Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples....”* While the feeding of the 5,000 is certainly not the LORD’s Supper, still, it is a miracle and a sign intended to point us to another miracle; the miracle of JESUS’ Body and Blood in and under the bread and wine of the LORD’s Supper for us poor sinners to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. In fact, this entire account clearly points one to the New Covenant in the Blood of JESUS CHRIST who is not a new Moses but one who is greater than Moses.

In Exodus, we read that Moses led God’s people, the Hebrews, out of a land of slavery and death through the waters of the Red Sea; JESUS came across the Sea of Galilee and a great multitude of people followed Him. Why did the people follow JESUS? Because of the signs which He performed on those who were diseased, just as Moses had performed and announced great signs in Egypt. Just as Moses went up Mt. Sinai with the elders of Israel where they saw God and ate and drank in His presence, so also, JESUS here ascends a mountain with His disciples, those He would soon appoint as leaders over His Church, and in JESUS, the people would see God, and eat and drink in His presence.

Clearly, the HOLY SPIRIT includes this text in the Gospel of St. John, in order to teach us that JESUS is greater than Moses; that JESUS alone is the One who sustains and leads us through the wilderness of this fallen world, through hunger and thirst, through illness and pandemics, through war and suffering, through pain and death, into the promised eternal life of the new heaven and the new earth.

Thus, the HOLY SPIRIT caused these words to be recorded for us that we may read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that they would create faith in us and, therefore, create life in us. But as for the Jews who followed JESUS that day, they were seeing a living prophesy. They would have seen in the signs and wonders worked by this Rabbi a clear connection to the Law and the Prophets. In fact, that is why they thought to make JESUS king.

Today, many understand the ancient writings of Holy Scripture as nothing more than a history of the Jews with a few prophecies thrown in for good measure. Surely, to some extent this is true. There is much in Holy Writ that gives us the history of this ancient and noble people. But the Old Testament is more than a simple recounting of history, and it is far more than a few vague prophecies about the coming of a MESSIAH, an “Anointed One”—JESUS, the CHRIST, can be found on every page and behind every word.

When JESUS walked among us, He spoke of Himself in terms of persons, places, and things from Israel’s past. He spoke as though the Old Testament is really a Book about Him and all He was accomplishing. JESUS tells us that the greater Jonah has come in *His* flesh; that in *His flesh*, one greater than Solomon is here. JESUS tells the people that *He* is the One that fulfills that which Moses, Aaron, and David could only have been faint shadows of, as though, when one reads of these spiritual giants of the past, one was looking at under-exposed photographs with indistinct, blurry images, or as though seeing through a glass dimly but now seeing face to face.

When one reads of Abraham and the near-sacrifice of Isaac, when one reads of the Levitical blood sacrifices, they are reading descriptions of the death of CHRIST and what His death means as a substitution for our eternal death. In JESUS, all those sacrificial animals, the cattle, the goats, the lambs, all of them, were swept from the altar so that JESUS could be sacrificed there in the place of every man, woman, and child that has ever lived, or will ever live. That means JESUS was sacrificed for you and me.

JESUS teaches us that the Old Testament cannot be read and understood as though part of it refers to JESUS and part of it does not. Every word, down to every jot and tittle, points to JESUS! This means that as we read of people who lived out their lives in the Old Testament, as we read of the events that took place in that long-ago age, we are not simply reading a history of a people and place long gone, and we are certainly not reading mythology. The Old Testament, indeed, all of Holy Scripture, is not simply a remembrance of the past, it is God’s promise for the future of those who fill its pages, and it is God’s promise for each of you as well, such that, Holy Scripture is not to be seen as what God has done, but what He continues to do for you in JESUS.

What has God done in JESUS? He has given you Bread that comes down from heaven that builds up not just your body, but your soul also. For this Divine Bread is not eaten and changed, becoming a part of you, it is not changed by your eating at all. When you eat this Bread, it changes you. The Israelites ate the manna in the desert and they still grew old or sick and died. But JESUS told the Jews in speaking of Himself, *“This is the Bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this Bread will live forever.”*

When JESUS saw the multitudes coming toward Him, He had compassion on them. He asked Philip where they might buy bread for all of these thousands to eat. Philip was a practical man and gave JESUS a practical answer. *“Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”*

JESUS asked this question so that He could teach His disciples that this heavenly Bread, which He will give, cannot be bought or sold. One does not buy this Bread of Life in the same way one purchases a loaf of bread at Publics or Winn-Dixie. Our God freely gives of this Bread through the ministry of His Word and Sacraments.

JESUS does this for you every time you come to Him in this Holy House where He dispenses life to you with the proclamation of His life-giving Word through absolution, liturgy, sermon, and Sacrament. All this without cost to you. In CHRIST, all come and dine on the most sumptuous food and the richest fare even if they do not have so much as one single penny in their pockets, for JESUS has already paid the price. And as we see in our text this morning, there is always more and more of this Bread of Life to be given to you. CHRIST’s gifts of life and forgiveness are limitless and eternal.

There, in the wilderness, JESUS fed the five thousand with bread and fish until they were full. Then He commanded His disciples to gather the leftovers into twelve baskets. Our LORD JESUS fills the Church today with Himself and it is full of eternal life. He gives His Flesh to a sinful world. JESUS gives His Flesh and Blood that all who will believe will have eternal life with Him and the FATHER, and on the Last Day, resurrection of the body from the grave. This is what He accomplished by giving up His Body and Blood on the Cross for the life of the world, and this is what we are to remember every time we kneel at this altar and partake of this gracious meal.

What JESUS died to give to the world, He distributes here among us through the very lowly meager means of water and word, bread and wine. When we see and hear them, they do not seem like much. Indeed, they seem rather weak and lowly, but JESUS multiplies them with His Word, amplifying their blessing, and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

What JESUS did with ordinary bread as He fed the five thousand, He does even more with the Bread of Life, His own Flesh, given on the Cross for your life. JESUS multiplies His Flesh to feed the nations, that in His Flesh they will find life forever.

JESUS is the daily Bread for which we pray. He is our Manna in this wilderness. He is our Bread of Life for eternal life. He is the one thing needful. Just as you could not conceive of a day that goes by without daily bread, so faith cannot conceive of a day that goes by in which we do not feed on the Bread of Life, or a LORD’s Day in which we do

not eat and drink at our LORD's table. Jesus is the essential service the Church brings to you; the essential service no man or woman can be without. He truly is the one thing needful.

The feeding of the five thousand was a foretaste of the greater Feast to come. The feeding of the five thousand points to the New Covenant in the Blood of JESUS who is greater than Moses. For this is He of whom Moses and the Prophets speak.

Come now, to the Feast in which our LORD took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words *"Take, eat, this is My ✠ Body which is given for you."* Come to the table of the LORD where He took the Cup after supper and gave it to the disciples saying, *"Take, drink, this is My ✠ Blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."* Come, do this in remembrance of CHRIST who saved you, who preserves you, who has promised to return for you.

This same JESUS who multiplied the bread for the five thousand is here for you today. Come all of you who suffer thirst caused by your sin. Come all of you with souls parched by the wilderness life of this world. Come all who hunger and thirst for true righteousness. Come all who have nothing to offer but a broken heart and a broken life, you who have no merit or worthiness in yourself, come and be filled at the table that was bought for you with the life of JESUS.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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