

God-Given Compassionate Sustenance

I think it's safe to say that everyone here is familiar with the account of the miraculous feeding that Jesus provides in our Gospel lesson for today. It's not *exactly* the same as the feeding of the five thousand, but just like the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (which had taken place earlier, on the other side—the Jewish side—of the Sea of Galilee), Jesus once again has compassion on the people who have come out to listen to Him and learn from Him. He has compassion on them because they have nothing to eat. In His great compassion He feeds them. He again works a providential miracle, giving those hungry, famished souls in His presence some much-needed sustenance. Just like in the feeding of the five thousand, everyone leaves *fully satisfied*, with an abundance—baskets full—of food left over.

Okay...so “*depart in peace,*” right? After all, we get it. What more needs to be said? Well...how often do we forget how all this applies to us in *our daily lives*, right here and right now? How often we treat these miraculous feedings as just that—miraculous; as in, Jesus worked a *specific* miracle for a *specific* group of people at a *specific*, unique time in history. I guess this only makes sense, right? In that respect, it is true. We don't see or hear about miracles like this being performed in our day and age, and with all the technology available, we would certainly know about it as soon as it happened. We can't go ten minutes without knowing what some celebrity or overpaid athlete ate for lunch or wore to the beach or how they feel about climate change or global warming or the Electoral College. That's all instant and ground-breaking news. If a *true* miracle like feeding thousands of people with only a few meager scraps would happen today, everyone would have their cell phones out, and we would know all about it just as soon as they could load it up to Facebook or Instagram or Twitter.

But...while this “particular/peculiar” aspect of the miraculous feeding is certainly true, *might we be missing something here?* Consider the fact that our forefathers made a point of pairing this Gospel lesson with the Old Testament account of God providing Adam and Eve a whole garden full of food to eat...with the *one proviso* that they don't eat of the one tree that God told them to not eat from. And before we go any further, it is important to point out here that God didn't just issue this prohibition for no good reason. “*Don't eat...because I say so.*” No. Admittedly, that should be a more than good enough reason for the child of God, but God goes beyond mere command/prohibition. He actually tells Adam and Eve precisely why they are not to eat of that tree. “*In the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.*” That's a pretty good reason, don't you think? And yet...we know how that all turned out.

And that's where I want to focus you today. Adam and Eve didn't listen to God. They rejected His gracious provisions. They rejected Him and His Word. He provided EVERYTHING to them, *including a very loving prohibition and warning*. He loved them enough to give them His Word; to tell them the Truth. *"If you eat of this, you will surely die. I don't want that. Don't eat of this tree."* In spite of all the overflowing abundance and goodness that God had so richly blessed them with, *they still wanted more; they wanted different*. They didn't want to be subordinates to God. They wanted to be like God. **They wanted their way.** *"Who does God think He is, telling us what we can and can't eat?"*

Now, I won't go into all the many ways that things still haven't really changed since our first parents rejected and despised God's abundant providence and Word. I don't really have to. The proof is all around us. The proof is staring at you from the mirror. Just ask yourself: What's most important to you? Maybe a better question is: *WHO is most important to you—God or you; His plans or your plans; His schedule or your schedule?* I'm willing to bet that if you took an **honest** look into the mirror of God's holy Law, you would find that you're a chip off the old Adam block. The sinful fruit hasn't fallen from the sinful tree at all. Adam despised God's Word and gracious providence, *and so do you...and so do I, by nature*. You can argue that this isn't the case with you. It's different. You love Jesus. But...before you open your mouth and try to justify yourself, ask yourself: *Would the fruits you bear in life contradict your confession?*

And this takes us back to the Gospel lesson; that miraculous feeding of the four thousand. This, my friends, is precisely what we so often miss when it comes to the Gospel lesson and that miraculous feeding. This account is so much more than God simply doing something *supernatural and unexplainable*. This isn't just a divine "magic trick" recorded for our amusement. I direct you back to the whole reason this miraculous feeding took place—the *compassion* of God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ. Here, in this desolate place, you see your compassionate God and Lord making good on His Garden promise; the promise to save and deliver His people from the curse of sin, death, and damnation; the curse that no man can save himself from, no matter how hard he tries; no matter how good his intentions. Here, on this desolate plain, you see your compassionate God and Lord giving His rebellious and fallen creation the very gift of life they so desperately need. It is here in this miraculous feeding that we see our compassionate and merciful God and Lord bringing about the *great reversal* from barrenness and starvation to overflowing abundance and satisfaction...from death to life.

And this divine compassion and providence goes even further than mere bread and fish and full bellies. Folks: I direct you to right here [the crucifix] and the great compassion and love that God has for each and every person borne of Adam. I direct your eyes, your ears, and your heart to this great reversal, from sin

to salvation, from death to life...*your life; your everlasting life and salvation with Him.* That's what heaven is—it's a return to Eden! It's a return to God's paradise, and God Himself provides the one and only way to that heavenly, Edenic paradise. "*No one comes to the Father except through Me. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*"

But here's the thing: This great and miraculous reversal is taking place *even right now, in your very presence.* God's great reversal isn't just limited to a mass feeding of thousands of people in the book of Matthew or the book of Mark. It's not even limited to Good Friday (although all that is needed to make full atonement for all sin for all time was accomplished and completed on that one single day on that one single cross – "It is finished, once and for all"). Still, God wasn't *finished* with the children of Adam on Good Friday, nor is His compassion and great reversing action limited to only one particular day in the unforeseen future, when Christ will return in all His glory.

No! Look here to this altar, this font, this pulpit. God's miraculous, compassionate nourishing and providing goes on *this very day, in our very midst!* Today, in your very presence, almighty God Himself holds out to you the *overflowing and never-ending* abundance of His peace, His perfect righteousness, and His undeserved forgiveness in the very simple forms of Word, water, bread, and wine. Here is Christ, freely feeding and providing, having unconditional compassion on all of us poor, miserable sinners, nourishing us with the one and only thing that can truly nourish us, sustain us, and save us—**Himself.**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: I can't make you desire any of this. I can't make this the most important thing to you. I can't make you fear, love, and trust in God *above all things, all the time,* desiring this undeserved compassion and grace of your God and Lord *over and above all things.* Only God can work this miracle of faith. Only God can work the great reversal from death to life that is repentant faith, which He does through His means of grace; His Bread of Life. So...that being the case, I do the one thing I can: I direct you to the outstretched arms of Him; *the outstretched arms of the very Bread of Life, come down from heaven and with you now.* "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.*" This is the confession of one who is *satiated and satisfied in Christ alone, by Christ alone.* May this confession—this Christ-centered reality—be your confession and your reality, all your remaining days until that blessed day when your Lord calls you home to the Eden He's already prepared for you. Until then, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good!*"

In Christ's holy Name...AMEN