

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” You can hear the desperation in Andrew’s voice. He was overwhelmed. He was worried. The problem was great, his solution fell short. The consequences were dire. The crowd is very large. They have very little food. All their money combined is woefully insufficient. It looks bad. It appears hopeless. So is the condition of fallen man.

Last week we faced the implications of the frailty and weakness of man. We who hold ourselves to be invincible and bulletproof learned quickly how weak we are. A virus so small that you can’t even see it has brought the world to its knees. The best and brightest minds, the most powerful governments, the very best scientific labs, haven’t been able to stop the spread or develop a cure. Many are sick. Some have died. Millions more are threatened.

We know the desperation, the insufficiency, the powerlessness that Andrew felt. What he could offer, five barley loaves and two small fish, was simply inadequate. What man can do isn’t enough. And this is especially true when the great multitude considered is the multitude of our sins. As great as the crowd was at the foot of that Galilean mountain, their number was small compared to the number of our sins.

And just as men have been unable to stop a tiny virus, just as men were unable to provide food sufficient for the crowd, even more - fallen men are unable to provide atonement for their sins. Count all your good works up, add to them your best efforts and intentions. Then compare them to the number of your sins, and you are compelled to say with Andrew “...what are they among so many?”

Consider the admonition of the Apostle: “Do you not hear the Law?” The Law of God is perfect and holy. It provides a curb to remind you when you stray from the path of righteousness. It provides you with a mirror by which you can examine yourself in light of the holiness that God requires.

It provides you a ruler by which to measure yourself, to see if your thoughts, words and deeds measure up to the perfection God requires. And the Law proves that they have not. You have fallen short.

“Make the people sit down”, the Lord said. The number of men was 5000. He “...took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted...” What men couldn’t do, the Lord did. He did it with a Word. His power surpasses our understanding. With God nothing is impossible.

The miracle did not come from men, for no man was sufficient, no man was capable. But the miracle was given through men. The Lord Himself, the God Man, multiplied the loaves and fish. No mere man could do that. But then the Lord gave that miraculous food to mere men – to His disciples - to give to the crowd. What men could not do, the Lord did. And He distributed that miracle through men to men.

Thanks be to God, by a miracle of grace, and mercy, and power, the crowd was fed. Even more, they received “as much as they wanted...” Grace abounds. God provides. In a real sense he saved them. But His salvation does not stop at the provision of daily bread, although He daily gives bread to the whole world.

He is the Savior of souls. The multitudes sated would soon hunger again. But the Lord that multiplied the loaves and fish is the Lord that gives Bread that sustains for eternity. He is the Bread of Life. All those who believe on Him will never die.

What men couldn't do, the Lord did. What their money couldn't buy, the Lord freely provided. He had compassion on the multitude. And so does He have compassion on you. He who fed the multitude denied Himself food in the wilderness, fasting forty days and forty nights. He who sets you free suffered Himself to be arrested and bound. And the sins too many for you to atone for, your sins, all your sins, He took upon Himself.

When it appeared most hopeless, He brought you hope. He who multiplied the loaves and fish did what you could not – on that Galilean mountain, and on that bloody hill called Golgotha. He who would not let them take Him and make Him king died under the epithet “King of the Jews.”

And in that, in His perfect life, in His precious suffering, in His Holy Death, there is great hope for you. In Christ there is healing for you. In Christ there is forgiveness for you. In Christ there is protection and sustenance and life for you. For He is the God Who Heals. He is the God Who Provides.

Hearken, then, to the Words of God spoken through the Prophet: “Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live.” For to hear Christ is to truly eat. Faith comes by hearing. To believe in Christ is to truly eat. He is the Bread of Life. With Christ alone is your soul satisfied. And as He promises, “He who eats this Bread will live forever.”

So rejoice, dear Christian. Do as the rose paraments bid. Rejoice that God has provided for you. Rejoice that God has saved you. In the face of epidemic and financial hardship and social distancing, rejoice. Rejoice, for all these things will pass away, but the Word of God, your salvation, will never pass away.

Rejoice that you are baptized, that your sins were washed away, and that you emerged from the waters of the font a new man, born from above, forgiven, restored, holy and blameless before God in Christ your Lord.

Rejoice, dear Christian, that the forgiveness Christ won on the cross is distributed to you. That forgiveness, God's forgiveness, the forgiveness won by Christ on the cross, does not come from mere men. But in mercy, in grace, the Lord distributes His miracle to you through men, through His called and ordained servant. He declares your sins forgiven for Christ's sake, and believing, that forgiveness is miraculously yours.

And as the Lord gave the loaves and fish to His disciples to give to the multitude, so does the same Lord give His Body and Blood to His servant to place in your mouth and pour across your

lips. It is a Meal more miraculous than the loaves and fish, for by this Meal you receive forgiveness and life. And while that Galilean meal fed 5000 men, with His Body and Blood the Lord feeds the whole Church, and every member who believes in Him receives the whole Christ.

Rejoice, dear Christian. God is with you. He can do what men cannot. He is stronger than sin, stronger than death, stronger than the devil. He is stronger than any virus. The men He fed on that Galilean mountain would hunger again. And they went the way of all flesh. But those who truly ate, those who believed in Christ, live forever.

And so it is with each of you. Christ has gives you the Holy Eucharist, the Medicine of Immortality. Your soul will live forever with the God who made you, the God who redeemed you, the God who sanctifies you. God has given you eternal life. So hear Christ, eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Hear, eat and drink, be healed, and your soul shall live.

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