

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

St. Mark records a miracle of our Lord. It is a truly amazing event, as are all the great signs and wonders of the Christ. But were we to design the miracle and its execution, we would certainly craft a different ending. The account of St. Mark seems a bit anticlimactic.

St. Mark reports what he has received first hand from Sts. Peter and Paul. St. Peter called Mark his “son.” Mark went with St. Paul on his first great Missionary Journey, together with Barnabas, but at odds with Paul Mark left. Later he went with Barnabas to Crete.

So the accounts of the life of our Lord St. Mark presents are from excellent sources – the Chief of the Apostles, and the Apostle born out of due time. And they are recorded with the perfect inerrancy of the Holy Spirit, Who moved St. Mark to write what you heard read this morning. But at first glance the account of the Feeding of the Four Thousand ends, well, according to human reason, oddly.

The Lord taught the great crowd in Galilee for three days. St. Matthew records that the crowd was large enough that He went up on a mountain to address them. The lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others they brought to Him, and He healed them. And as if that weren’t miraculous enough, He multiplied seven loaves and a few fish and fed the multitude, four thousand men and the women and children with them.

Then the Lord sent them away. He didn’t keep them for instruction in righteousness. He didn’t mount an intense evangelism program under the credo “time is short and hell is hot.” The Lord and His Apostles weren’t “ablaze”. They were no “evangelicals”. He taught them. He worked miracles. And then He sent them away.

The Matthean account reveals what is perhaps the reason he sent them away. After the miracle, he crossed over the Galilee with His disciples, but they forgot to bring bread to eat. The Lord warned them: “Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” As they pondered the meaning of the Lord’s Words, they proposed that it had to do with forgetting the bread. The Lord rebuked them: “O ye of little faith... do you not understand or remember... the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?”

So it was never about the bread. And that’s the point. The crowd thought that it was. The disciples thought that it was. The Lord did miraculous works and spoke heavenly Words, but fallen men heard with earthly ears and hardened hearts. It went straight to their bellies. But it wasn’t about bread at all.

And still the Lord fed them. He had compassion on them. He saw their hunger. He Himself knew hunger. God, the God to whom the eyes of all look for their meat in due season, fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. He thirsted. He knew fatigue and pain. So He knew what the multitudes suffered. The Christian faith is an incarnational faith – God cares about your soul, but also about your body. For God Himself took on a Body like unto yours. He is the Great High Priest, the Apostle writes, that can sympathize with your weakness.

So the same Paul from whom Mark separated writes of that weakness, the weakness of your flesh. He writes that in the weakness of the flesh you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness. More than just hungry for bread that God provides, your flesh hungers for the very things God forbids. And the Lord knows what you endure, for He Himself was tempted.

He did not sin. But you have. You have given in to the desires of the flesh, to the fallen ways of a sinful heart. So, the Apostle bids you, consider what fruit did you have in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But now, having been set free from sin, you have your fruit to holiness, and in the end, everlasting life. You have the fruit of holiness because of the Fruit of the Cross, because the Christ who took on your flesh suffered that Flesh to be torn. He suffered and died in your stead. He, being sinless, vested Himself in the sins of all men, in your sins, and gave Himself as the Once-for-all sacrifice on the altar of the cross.

He who took the seven loaves and gave thanks prayed the Father, but was forsaken of Him. He who was surrounded by multitudes died in darkness after most of His followers fled. He who had compassion on the multitude was shown no compassion. He who healed and blessed was mocked and abandoned to death.

But death could not hold the One who did marvelous signs and wonders. He worked His greatest miracle when He defeated death, and took up His life again. He who was born in the House of Bread, He who is the very Bread of Life, has better bread for you.

The disciples asked “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” The Lord responded with a miracle. And so for you, in the wilderness of this fallen world, does the Lord give miraculous Bread. As He fed the four thousand, so too He gives you your daily bread, that you may know Him as the Good and Gracious Giver of all things. In mercy, in love, He provides what you need for this body and life.

He is the Bread of Life. He is the True Bread that came down from heaven. “He who eats this Bread”, the Lord says, “will live forever.” Faith eats Christ. Faith believes in Him. Faith believes that He died and rose for you. Faith receives His Word, faith clings to His Promises, and faith is satisfied.

Seven is the covenant number, the number of God’s Promises to those He has chosen. So He took the seven loaves, gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to His disciples to set before the multitudes. And so He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said “Take, eat. This is My Body, which is given for you.”

And so this day does He place His Body and Blood with Bread and Wine, and give it to His Called and Ordained servant to place into your mouth. Believing, rightly discerning His Body, you receive worthily. You eat and drink, and your sins are forgiven. Your faith is strengthened. And you are satisfied with miraculous food. And you know that while He gives you bread, it isn’t about the bread. It is about the Christ, Christ for you.

He feeds you. But you He does not send away. For Isaiah promised “Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His works before Him.” You receive of the fruits of the cross, and as St. Paul promised, “You have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” He feeds you and keeps you in His One, Holy catholic Church.

The feeding of the four thousand wasn't about bread. It was about Christ. It was about believing in Him, which is the true eating of faith. The same Christ feeds you today, and the ancient Prophecy is fulfilled. For in Christ, You are called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord, and you are called sought out, a city not forsaken. You are the Holy Church, the chaste, pure Bride, who the Lord draws to Himself, soon to be the New Jerusalem, the Church Victorious. And you will never be sent away. For the Gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus your Lord.

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