

Grace and peace in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for today is a well-known story: The feeding of five thousand with five loaves and two small fish by our Lord. Why do we read this story on the fourth Sunday in Lent?

This is a story of the Lord's mercy and His power to care for his followers. Its point is we must trust in God for all our spiritual and material needs. It is good for us to read, because we live in a time of shortages of food and medicine.

¹After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ²And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, **"Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"** ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

A denarius was the salary for a day's work. The disciples did not have the money to buy food for the crowd. However, "One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰Jesus said, **"Have the people sit down."** Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.

Similar words are found in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-25. "For I received from the Lord what I also taught you: That the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, took bread; And having given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of me. And he also took the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: do this as often as ye drink, in remembrance of me."

With these words, our Lord instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper on Holy Thursday of Holy Week. The feeding of five thousand occurred around Passover, the feast of the Jews. Also the Passion and death of Jesus Christ happened during the celebration of the Passover. The Jews celebrated Passover with a meal of an unblemished lamb and unleavened bread to remember when the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt because of the blood of a lamb. Our Lamb is Jesus.

Another name for the sacrament is the Eucharist, derived from the Greek, εὐχαριστία, or "thanksgiving". Why? He took bread and, having given thanks, broke it. Also, in our text for today, Jesus took those loaves, and having given thanks, he distributed them to the disciples. In this case, the disciples divided them among the others. Jesus commanded the apostles to administer the sacrament to believers. Therefore, the story of the feeding of five thousand is a preview of the institution of the sacrament.

Today the duties of the ministers of the church are still publicly preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments. The church, as the body of Christ, has the duty to support the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, also to attend to the material needs of its members and others. Sometimes it seems to us that we do not have

the resources to make a difference when so many are in need, but with the blessing of God we can.

Our text says that after the thanksgiving and the blessing of Jesus to the five loaves and two small fish, they all ate and more: "And when they were filled, he said to his disciples, Gather up the pieces that are left; lest anything be lost. And they gathered, and filled twelve baskets of fragments of the five loaves of barley, which were left over to them that had eaten."

In baptism we receive the best gift of God, the promise of eternal life. The Holy Spirit created faith in us, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we recognize that for our sins we deserve nothing good from the hands of God. However, God loved us so much to send His Son to die in our places. With the help of the Spirit, then, we recognize all good things as God's blessings to us. And our response to God's love is to share our blessings with others. We rely on God for our spiritual and material needs, and also for the resources to help others.

What happened after the feeding of the five thousand? "And when they saw the sign that Jesus had made, they said, This is the prophet that was to come into the world. But when Jesus understood that they were coming to take him and make him king, he went back to the mountain alone." When Jesus had fasted for 40 days in the desert, the devil tempted him with these words: "If you are the Son of God let these stones become bread. " But Jesus answered and said unto him, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

The mission of the church is not to eliminate hunger forever, but to provide the consolation of God's gospel and help people in their difficulties until all will pass and Christ will return in glory. This is our

"Blessing and Thanksgiving" - John 6:1-15 Laetare 2021

hope and in this we have peace that surpasses all understanding.
Amen.