

Laetare, A ✕ D 2009

John 6:1-15 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting 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?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus 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. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Maybe the crowd gathered by the Sea of Galilee had heard the way Jesus rebuked the devil with the quotation from Deuteronomy: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." And so, choosing the Word of God over bread, the followed Jesus without regard for where they would find their next meal. Maybe. Or maybe they were just too careless to have packed a lunch when they would find themselves far away from a town and too hungry even to walk home. They saw the signs Jesus was doing, and they wanted some of these miracles for themselves.

2 Whatever the reason, the crowd of five thousand men, plus women and children—probably fifteen thousand or more, all told—found themselves gathered around Jesus in a desolate place, when the hour had grown late, and they were hungry. So were the Israelites. They didn't doubt the Lord's presence, just His provision for them: "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the Land of Egypt, when we sat by meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." But the Lord heard their grumbling and provided quail in the evening and manna in the morning: plenty

of food each day. Everyone gathered enough, some more some less; but those who gathered more had none left over, and those who gathered less lacked nothing. The Lord was delivering His people out of slavery to the Egyptians and bringing them into the promised land of Canaan. He who cared for His people enough to deliver them from the affliction of slavery, would He not also care for them enough to deal with the affliction of hunger?

3 So also the Lord provided for the crowd gathered on the shore of Galilee. He took the lunch from a boy clever enough to bring food for himself and, having given thanks, distributed the boy's five barley cakes and two pickled fish to the crowd of thousands. And everyone ate until he was full. When the disciples gathered the leftovers, they each filled a basket, making twelve full baskets of gracious leftovers from the miraculous feeding. With their bellies filled, the crowd sought to take Jesus and make him their king. But the miraculous sign of feeding the crowd in the wilderness was not to confirm that their bread king, their free meal ticket, had arrived, but to confirm that this Jesus whom they followed, was the same Lord who provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. But all the crowd wanted were full bellies and fatter wallets. So Jesus withdrew.

4 The crowd missed the bigger picture. Sure, the Lord provided them bread and fish to keep them from perishing, but even bread and fish from the Lord wouldn't sustain them forever. Yes, the Lord provides daily bread, even to all evil people. He sustains you for as many days as you are alive. And if you wallow in the midst of despair, questioning whether what the Lord gives is truly enough, repent. But don't see in the Lord's provision of daily bread the end. He's no mere bread king. Having your belly full, your wallet fat, your bank account secure, your life neatly ordered, or your body in good health are nice when they happens, but they can cause you to miss the bigger picture like the crowds at Galilee or the Israelites in the wilderness. The Lord gives daily bread, to be sure. Repent of failing to receive it with thanksgiving, and repent of thinking daily bread is what it's all about. Daily bread is not the end.

5 Thinking of the Lord as a bread king is akin to the little girl who sees her daddy as someone to protect her from the monsters under her bed. Her fear is real, even if the monsters are not. So how does her father protect her from her fear of the monsters? He provides for her real needs. He works to put a roof over her head and food on her table. He instructs her in the faith. He protects her from the real dangers in the world. The monsters aren't her real problem. Eat your vegetables, dear, and the monsters won't hurt you. Live in this house, and the monsters can do you no harm. Neither is daily bread your real problem. The Israelites in the wilderness eventually died; the crowds by the Sea of Galilee eventually died; the disciples through whom Jesus fed the crowds eventually died; and so will you eventually die. That's your real problem.*

6 So what does the Lord do? Immediately following today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells the crowd, "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life." Death is the real problem, caused by sin—your sin, Adam's sin, the world's sin—and bread is the solution. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

7 Your heavenly Father provided for your real needs by sending His Son Jesus to be the substitutionary sacrifice for sin. The Living Bread from heaven gives life by laying down His life. His death on the cross destroyed the monsters of sin, death, and the devil. He has dealt with your real problems. You wanted a bread king; the King of Kings is the Living Bread from Heaven.

8 Instead of dealing with your day-to-day monsters, which aren't real compared with what the Lord has really given, He provides an eternal escape from their affliction. He gives you shelter in the house of His Church. Here you are safe and warm, guarded from the assaults of the devil and the world. The afflictions of hunger, poverty, sickness, suffering, real though they seem, are no more real, have no more lasting consequence than the monsters under your bed.

9 Instead, you have the Living Bread from heaven. His flesh which He gives you in His Holy Supper is true food, and His blood is true drink. Whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood by faith will live forever. Eat my Body, He says. Drink my Blood. Stay in my house. The monsters cannot hurt you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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*Thanks to Pr. Curtis for the illustration in this paragraph.