

Laetare (Lent 4) – Exodus 16:2-21; Galatians 4:21-31; John 6:1-15

John does not call the feeding of the five thousand a miracle, but a sign. Now surely it was miraculous, but that's not the important thing. The important thing is what it tells us about Jesus. Feeding a multitude in wilderness places should bring up the wilderness wanderings of the Children of Israel. The Jesus that fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish is the same God that fed the children of Israel in the wilderness with manna and quail. Jesus is the God who feeds. He is the God who provides daily bread.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

You know this from the catechism. Also,

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

How does God do this?

He certainly doesn't provide manna from heaven anymore.

How does God provide daily bread? Just like He provides everything else, that is, through normal means.

There have been a lot of creative memes during this time of COVID-19. Many have expressed gratitude to farmers. And rightly so. But what do the farmers rely on?

Sun and rain.

As Jesus says in Matthew 5, "God makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust." (v. 45)

I believe any farmer you talk to will admit that the sun and rain are out of their control. They might not admit that it is God who controls the sun and rain, but they know they have no control over either.

That's why we are to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. We know that it is only possible to receive it from His loving hand.

How does God deliver this wonderful gift?

Through very ordinary means. Through farmers and manufacturers and distributors, God provides all of us with our daily bread. Included in this, of course, is medicine.

God works through very ordinary means.

He gives you His word in a book. Written by men "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21) God used ordinary men who were eyewitnesses to write in ordinary language His enduring Word.

He gives you Holy Baptism with ordinary water. It is water combined with God's Word that washes you clean of all your sins. God uses regular pastors and regular water to place His name on you and make you His child.

He gives you the Holy Supper with ordinary bread and wine. It is bread and wine combined with God's Word that makes the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus. God uses regular pastors and plain bread and wine to provide for you the living bread from heaven for the forgiveness of your sins and the edifying of your faith.

He gives you daily bread through ordinary people. Farmers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers make available for you the items you need for this body and life. This also includes ordinary scientists, doctors, parents, policemen, firemen, politicians; yes, even politicians, to provide medicine, safety, and order so that you might live in peace and good order. These are ordinary people that God uses.

This includes you. God uses ordinary people to provide your daily bread and He uses you to provide daily bread for others.

One of the positive outcomes of the current pestilence is the realization that we rely upon each other! I pray that many families may reconnect during this difficult time and realize that parents are responsible for their children and not the government, schools, or daycares. When I was a teenager, there was this informational campaign to have quality time with your kids. Especially dads. Well, you don't get the quality time without the quantity time. How can you have quantity time or quality time when you constantly hand your kids over to social agencies? How can you have quantity or quality time when parents won't get married or so easily divorce? How can you have either when you pacify your kids with screens or gadgets.

Repent.

This is a time of repentance. Not only for neglecting our kids, but for neglecting something far greater... our God!

We are guilty of neglecting His Word. And neglecting His Sacrament.

Thanks be to God we have His Word with us. Technology allows me to deliver the Word to you even though I can't be with you face to face.

We must have the Word. It is what gives you life.

First, you don't even know you need Christ until you hear the Word of God. Paul reminds us that "if it had not been for the law, he would not have known sin." (Romans 7:7)

Second, the Holy Spirit works faith in you through the Word as Paul says, "Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

Third, Jesus reminds you during His temptations by Satan that, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

You still have His Word. Hear it. Believe it. Pray it.

You need the Sacrament of the Altar. It gives you forgiveness of sins and strengthens your faith. Jesus says, take eat... take drink... for you... the forgiveness of sins. Paul warns against disuse and even says that many are weak or ill because of misuse of the supper and some had even died. (1 Corinthians 11:30)

How often have we treated the Lord's Supper as if it didn't matter?

How often have we figuratively thrown it as pearls before swine with not practicing closed communion? If someone despises Christ so much that He despises His church, why would we give them the Church's greatest possession?

How often have we acted as if the bread and wine aren't Christ's true Body and Blood? Are we cavalier about so precious a gift?

Repent.

We are being chastised for a time. We cannot meet with each other for a short time to share in Christ's body and blood together. But remember God chastises those whom He loves.

He loves you dearly. So dearly that He sent His only Son to die for you. Even death on a cross. He payed for all your sin on the cross so you don't have to carry that debt. You are made a child of God through faith in Jesus. As a child of God you receive the full inheritance that Jesus won with a perfect life and death... forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life.

God cares for you. He gives you daily bread. I would encourage you to use the dinner prayers found in the Small Catechism. You've probably hear me use an abbreviated form of them. Here's the full form:

Before you eat:

The eyes of all look to You, [O LORD,] and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. (Ps. 145: 15–16)

Then shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

After you eat:

Also, after eating, they shall, in like manner, reverently and with folded hands say: Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever. [He] gives food to every creature. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in

the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love. (Ps. 136:1, 25; 147:9–11)

Then shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Now, of course, these are just suggested prayers, but I encourage you to use them or a modified form of them. They help you “to receive your daily bread with thanksgiving.”

Remember the words of Paul: “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?”

Amen.