

Sunday Next Before Advent

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Date: 23 November 2025

Preacher: Seminarian Matthew Stuart

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In today's gospel, our Lord asked Philip a simple question about feeding a hungry crowd.

Philip should have known the answer, but his mind was focused on the size of the problem rather than the presence of the one who stood before him.

He knew the story of Moses and the manna in the wilderness, yet he did not make the connection to that story. He did not see the same God who fed Israel long ago was standing right in front of him, ready to act with the same power and mercy.

He failed to see that Jesus is not merely another Moses. He is the God who led Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness. Jesus is the one who feeds us with his own body so that we might have life in him.

John gives us an important detail that frames how we are to understand this miracle. Verse 4 says, Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

[1 : 19] Passover was a yearly remembrance of God's deliverance. The sacred time when Israel recalled how the Lord brought them out of Egypt and fed them with the bread from heaven.

It was a time of remembering and participating in God's saving work. So when John mentions that this miracle happens at Passover, he invites us to see that this moment belongs to that same story of salvation and provision.

This moment is not merely about hunger. Jesus is revealing who he is. He is one greater than Moses.

He is the true bread from heaven. He is the fulfillment of everything the Passover taught to Israel. The signs and patterns from the old covenant now stand complete in him.

And in this miracle, we see the fullness of God's faithfulness made visible in the flesh. Jesus goes up to the mountain just as Moses once did.

[2 : 31] Jesus sits with a multitude in a deserted place, just as Moses stood before the people in the wilderness. The crowd is hungry and needs bread, just as Israel needed the manna that fell from heaven.

These familiar details help us to see that the God who once fed his people in the wilderness is with them now, feeding them again.

Jesus is not just repeating the past. He is fulfilling it, bringing every promise to its intended goal.

The people began to recognize this in verse 14.

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world. Now, they remember this promise in Deuteronomy 18, that God would raise up a prophet like Moses.

When they see the bread multiplied in the wilderness, when they see the compassion and the power behind the act, they understand that Jesus is the one Moses spoke of, the one long awaited by Israel.

[3 : 48] But before this becomes clear, Jesus turns to Philip with a question. Verse 5 and 6 tell us, When Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw a great multitude coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?

But this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip had already witnessed our Lord perform miracles, and he had seen his compassion, and he had heard his teaching.

He had every reason to trust that Jesus could provide. Yet in this moment, Philip falls back on his own limitations, instead of remembering the faithfulness and promises of God.

In verse 7, he answers, Philip focuses on what they do not have.

He focuses only on the need and decides that nothing can be done. He stands before the one who brought bread from heaven in the days of Moses, and yet he only sees an impossible situation.

[5 : 09] His heart has not yet grasped that the very God who fed Israel now stands before him in the flesh as the true bread of heaven. How fitting is this for us here at St. Philip's?

Our patron saint knew the scriptures, yet he struggled to recognize their fulfillment standing right in front of him. We often find ourselves in the same place, knowing the truths of our faith, yet hesitant to trust them when life presents us with challenges that seem beyond our strength.

Andrew steps forward with a small, humble offering, five barley loaves and two fish. He knows it's not enough, but he brings it to our Lord anyway.

Jesus receives what is given, he gives thanks, and he multiplies it until the crowd has more than enough. This small offering becomes abundant in the hands of Christ.

In the Exodus event, when the Hebrews left Egypt, the manna that fell from heaven was enough for each day, but never more than was needed for that one day.

[6 : 38] It sustained the people, but nothing more. Jesus, however, acts with abundant generosity. Verse 11 says, the people ate as much as they wanted.

Our Lord meets our needs fully and completely, because he himself is the true bread from heaven who satisfies the deepest hunger of the human heart.

John then adds a detail that speaks the ongoing life of the church. Verse 13 says, therefore, they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets with the fragments.

The 12 baskets are a sign of the apostolic ministry that continues in the church today. The Lord entrusts his abundance to the apostles, and through their successors, bishops, and priests, he continues to feed his people.

We gather today because Christ continues to give himself to his church through the sacraments that he established. The crowd recognizes Jesus as the promised prophet, but they must understand his mission.

[7 : 59] They want to make him king by force. They want a leader who will solve political problems and restore earthly freedoms. They look for a Messiah who fits their expectations rather than the Redeemer who has come to save them from sin and death.

Jesus does not simply give bread. He is the bread. The manna sustained Israel for a short time, but the life he gives endures forever.

The Passover lamb saved the firstborn for one night, but Jesus is the true Passover lamb, the one greater than Moses, and his salvation is eternal.

Philip was close to Jesus, yet he did not see him clearly. He saw the problem, but not the one who could answer it. We often respond in the same way.

We face needs that overwhelm us, and we look first at our own limitations rather than to the Lord who stands with us and calls us to feed on him and to trust in him.

[9 : 19] We must remember what Philip missed. Christ is the fulfillment of every promise. He is the true manna, the good shepherd, the Passover lamb.

In every circumstance, he is sufficient. And Jesus still feeds his people, not only in this miracle long ago, but here and now through the church.

In the Holy Eucharist, we receive the true bread from heaven. We feed on Christ himself. The apostolic baskets remain full, and Christ continues to nourish his people with his own life.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.