

Sunday Next

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[0 : 0 0] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. In the last sermon that I preached, I talked about what it meant for us to have true faith. The gospel account of the royal official's son being healed by Jesus taught us what it meant to have faith in him.

Having faith in Christ is having confidence that what he says is true and adjusting our lives accordingly. Similarly, today's gospel teaches us about faith.

While the account about the official's son is more general, this text speaks about something specific to be believed. What this text asks us to believe is this.

Jesus Christ does not fail to feed and nourish our souls. What I hope to do is show that this feeding and nourishing happens primarily in the Eucharist.

[1 : 0 8] It is a mystery to us, but like all other mysteries, all other mysterious ways that God works, we must have faith that he is working as he says he is.

In St. John's gospel, this story follows the healing of the bedridden man on the Sabbath. After the healing, Jesus crosses over the Sea of Galilee, and a large multitude of people follow him and his disciples because of the signs that he was performing.

They were hungry and in need of food. The portrayal of this narrative brings us back to when the Israelites were in the wilderness and also in need of food. The Israelites complained to Moses, and Moses asked God to provide for them.

God rained down manna from the sky, and Moses was seen back in that day as the Redeemer who caused bread to rain down from heaven. What makes our gospel text for today more interesting is the traditions that developed after the manna event in the wilderness.

All of them build off of the previous ones. The first early tradition was the belief that the manna was something that existed before it rained down from the heavens.

[2 : 2 1] The Jews believed that it was one of the things that was created on the eve of the seventh day when God rested from his work. Following on this tradition, there was another one that held that the manna was something that was reserved in the heavenly temple where God dwelt.

This manna did not consist of material things as we would think of them or see them, but it was just as real, if not more real, than the material in the mind of the Jews. These traditions are interesting, but the most important one for us today is the next one.

This manna that existed in heaven was believed to return again from heaven. They believed that the Messiah was going to be a new Moses, and therefore, when the Messiah came, he would bring with him the bread of heaven.

This fulfillment would show that the time is drawing nearer and nearer to a close. Now that we're aware of some of these traditions, let's look at our gospel text again.

After Jesus crosses over the Sea of Galilee, there's a large crowd of people who are following him because of the signs he was performing. Just like in many other situations, most people are there to be wowed and mesmerized by a magician.

[3 : 34] Being who he is, Jesus always takes opportunities like these to teach them and us about who he is. He asks the disciples how they will feed so many people, a number that is recorded as 5,000 men.

He didn't ask because he didn't know what he was going to do, but rather to test the faith of his followers. They puzzled themselves, trying to figure out how to do so. Philip being concerned about not having enough money for all of them, and Andrew finding food, but knowing that it isn't going to be enough.

This should recall us back to the wilderness episode after the exodus from Egypt. When the manna fell from heaven, many of them collected more food than they needed because they were afraid that they wouldn't have enough to get by on.

Just as they didn't have faith that the father was going to take care of their daily bread, the disciples didn't have faith that our Lord would provide everyone with what they needed.

So, he makes the people sit down and he blesses the loaves of bread and the fish from the boy. He then begins to break it and pass it around to the people. All of the people were fed until they were not hungry.

[4 : 44] Afterward, Jesus told the disciples to gather up the leftovers so that none should be lost. They were able to fill 12 baskets up with the fragments of the barley loaves.

Remember again the raining down of manna from heaven. The Israelites were only to gather what they needed for the day. If they gathered up too much, it would go bad the next day.

After the day was over, the leftover manna that was on the ground disappeared. When Jesus finished feeding the 5,000, they collected all that was left over. It did not go to waste the same way it did whenever the Israelites were fed in the wilderness.

So, why are these details significant for our understanding? They are significant, first of all, because of the significance the Jews would have found in the example that he gave.

This is the new Moses, the Messiah, who returned with the bread from heaven. This is the Messiah who will bring an end to the times as they are known to all people.

[5 : 47] The consummation is at hand. The beginning of the end has come near. This is the Messiah who will feed his people. Who will feed his people that they will be hungry no more.

Contrary to not having any leftover manna in the wilderness account, this narrative shows us a symbolic picture. A symbolic picture of the church being gathered together so that none may be lost.

The Didache, a written tradition of the teachings of the 12 disciples, speaks about these fragments being gathered in this way. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and become one, so let thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.

For thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. Now that we've covered this necessary ground, we return back to the content that this passage encourages us to believe in.

Just as the Israelites were to have faith in God to feed them with the heavenly bread in the wilderness, we are called to believe and to trust that our Lord will feed us with the true bread of life.

[7 : 0 6] This true bread is none other than his own flesh and blood. When you return home today, continue reading the rest of this chapter. Not only do we learn in this chapter that he is the bread of life, but we also learn that if we eat of this bread, Jesus Christ, we will live forever.

When we partake of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we receive within our very bodies and souls the life which belongs to God.

Friends, let us not take this holy feast doubting the words of our Lord. Let us instead come to the altar with hunger, desiring to receive the very life of Jesus through bread and wine.

For, as our Lord says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.