

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ²"I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." ⁴And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" ⁵And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. ⁷And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

It had been a long day indeed. The disciples, the crowds that gathered, the religious leaders – all had the same affliction – they were hungry. They'd been listening to Jesus deliver His sermon on the mount for hours now, and He had just concluded His instruction. He taught them as one with authority, not abolishing the Law of the Old Testament, nor the Prophets, but fulfilling them – in what was to come, and through His sinless life. Yet, their physical bodies were protesting having their needs be met during this time – they were able to turn off their cravings for food for a while, but eventually, their sinful human bodies needed to be fed. I've heard a phrase that's been coined in recent years – those

who are hungry, and angry about it, are said to be “hangry”, combining the two terms. Things were starting to get tense among the people, as they realized that they were far from town, unable to easily get food for the evening meal. Someone was going to have to do something, or the people were likely to turn on the disciples, and perhaps even Jesus Himself, for not “thinking ahead” and providing for them to have a meal together when the teaching was done.

You know how it is when you host a party – it’s expected that you’ll have at least hors d’oeuvres if you have a gathering of folks. Depending on the time of day, more or less food will be expected – from a snack to a full-blown meal. That’s why if you’re not intending to serve a meal, your get-together should happen from, say, 2 until 4 pm. Jesus’ teaching stretched on into the afternoon, and even into the evening, because He had so much to say. The disciples and the crowds were drinking it in, learning from the feet of the Master Himself, Him reinterpreting Scriptures in light of Himself that they had never heard before.

Some of the details that we’ve read previously in the feeding of the 5000, a separate event in Jesus’ ministry, aren’t given here. Combine this with the brevity of Mark’s account, which is usual in his Gospel, and you don’t have a lot of details here. There’s nothing recorded about this being a little boy’s lunch, about the disciples’ incredulity about this plan working, or how many fish were involved. Mark assumes that the readers are interested in getting to the point, the Passion of Jesus, and doesn’t spend much time in the preliminaries of Him getting there. That’s why he uses terms like “Immediately” and other words to get to the point. Some have called Mark’s Gospel the outline version of Jesus’ life, not so much biography as the highlights, with the most important events being recorded, and lots of the “fluff” left out. Whatever the case, this narrative gives us the full impact of Jesus’ actions, His words, and the results of His reaching into the situation, and solving it by His power and His love and mercy. He didn’t want them to go without their physical needs being met; He didn’t want them to have enmity toward Himself or the disciples dictated by physical hunger. What’s more, He wanted to point ahead to a

further point in His earthly ministry when He would heal not just the physical needs of His people, but also their heavenly, spiritual needs – the need for the forgiveness of sins, and the strengthening of both our bodies AND our souls. Let’s delve a little bit into this narrative, and see what we can glean from it.

Since we know that Jesus was part of creation, and not just a bystander, we can draw connections between His creation of the world “ex nihilo”, out of nothing, and His creation of bread and fish in Mark Chapter 8. Our Old Testament reading for this morning talks about God’s creation of man – once there were no human beings on this planet; after God finished speaking, there were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Moses speaks here about the creation of the trees of the Garden, the creation of the rivers that would water the garden – it’s quite ingenious, only possible with the mind of God – that all of this would work together perfectly, symbiotically. Adam’s job – to work the land and take care of it. However, before the fall into sin, this would have taken place without toil, without tiredness, without the frailties of our human nature. Imagine being able to grow crops without any weeds, with just the right amount of rain falling in due season, and nothing to interfere with the crop coming to full fruition (e.g., no hail, no derechos, etc.). That happened in the Garden, when everything was governed by God’s grace and mercy, and according to His perfect plan. Adam and Eve were fed from these plants in the garden, and there was no need or lack – they always had enough food for their sustenance, and not too much so that they would fall into the temptation to gluttony and die prematurely.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he speaks of the limitations of this sinful body that we inhabit for a time – we have physical handicaps, we need to have food, and it isn’t always there when we need it. Thanks be to God for providing for all of our needs! He’s the only way that we can rejoice in being made children of God, included in His promise of eternal life in heaven. In addition, we’re made righteous in God’s sight – our sins are removed from us as far as the East is from the West. Even though this is a continuous reading from Romans, it still has some bearing on the theme of this Sunday – God’s abundant blessings, His provision for His people, even amidst seemingly impossible odds of success.

Witness the problem that was presented to Jesus' on the Mount of the Long Sermon, here in Mark Chapter 8 – He needed to step in, or there was going to be a great lack of food on the part of the people. They forgot about needing food, because they were so enamored with His preaching. He knew that they needed it, but wanted to provide it in a way that they knew that He was the One that was doing it – in other words, His intervention was the only way in which the food would occur – miraculously. Similarly to the Israelites that were sojourning in the desert, there was no way that the manna could have appeared on the ground unless God directly provided it, or the quail, or the water out of the rock. In this case, there was no way that there was going to be enough in seven loaves and a few fish to feed 4000 people – unless, of course, it was Jesus doing the blessing and distributing. He wanted to remind them that everything that they had and everything that they were came from God Himself – out of love, to be sure, but to help them remember that but for Him, they would be dying and dead in their sins, possessing nothing that they needed to support this body and life, much less eternal life in heaven to come.

That's the other point in this text that we must remember – the feeding of the 4000, and also recorded in the Gospels, the feeding of the 5000 – these were types, or foreshadowing, of the great provision that Jesus would later provide in the Lord's Supper. It's no mistake that there was a meal going on, that Jesus provided something miraculous, that bread was involved, that giving thanks was a part of it, and similarity after similarity. Some would say that this wasn't an allusion to the Lord's Supper in the future, because there wasn't wine present. But, I would say to that objection that you can see the bread as a shorthand to mentioning both the bread and the wine – when you mention one, the other is assumed. And besides, the provision of God is the point, not all of the details.

In the same way that Jesus provided for the needs of the 4000 people out in the field, He provides for our needs today, as well as the needs of all believers down through the generations. They needed physical sustenance through eating food; we need physical and spiritual sustenance that we

receive in the Lord's Supper. They needed to be reminded that God was in control, and actively providing for their needs; we need to be reminded that our sins are forgiven, and we receive the gift of eternal life, through this holy eating and drinking. Just like Jesus was physically present at the feeding of the 4000, so He is truly present today with us, in the fact that what we eat and drink in the Sacrament ARE His body and blood, present in some unknown way in the bread and wine. It's not a symbol; it's actually the fruits of His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. All of the objections, both to the feeding of the 4000 and to the Real, Physical presence of Christ in the Sacrament, are rooted in the same error – it doesn't make sense to us humans. We forget that Jesus is not limited by our understanding – He is the Triune God, He is in control of all that He has made. If He decides to cause good food to multiply in the presence of the disciples, then it happens! If He decides to give us His Body and Blood to eat and to drink, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our bodies and souls, then it happens. He is not limited by our understanding – in fact, when we try to insert our own knowledge and understanding, we often get ourselves in trouble. He inserted this narrative to help the people who were sitting in front of Him, it is true. But He also did it for the future, for those who would read this hundreds and thousands of years later – this testimony is faithful and true, and helps us connect the dots between God's holiness and His love for us His children.

I don't know about you, but when I get hungry, I can get pretty cranky! Ask those that are around me the most! This applies to missing just one or two meals, not to mention not eating all day, as we're told in the feeding of the 5000. Many of us start daydreaming about a luscious feast; the television with its provocations sure doesn't help in this regard. I know that many of us eat too much; however, there's still a minimum amount of food that we need to intake in order to not have the body start literally eating itself! Combine this with the fact that the usual practice in Jesus' day was to have one main meal of the day (dinner – in the evening), and missing that meal wasn't something that anyone looked forward to. And, they didn't have the local McDonald's to run down to and have food in their

hands in less than 10 minutes – there was the time of preparation, the tracking down of ingredients, all of which added up to quite a bit of time before they were going to eat. And, with the sun going down on yet another day, there would be this additional impediment to having their hunger be sated – after dark, not much happened in Jesus’ day, because there was no artificial light to help aid work done during the darkness. Suffice it to say, Jesus had a pretty severe problem on His hands with all of these people proceeding from hungry to ravenous. They would pretty soon start to blame Him for the problem, and forget all about the teachings that He had spent the better part of the day imparting to them.

But, because He was and is God, He had a way out of the problem. He caused there to be much more bread and fish than was humanly possible, solely by His eternal power and Godly might. He specializes in miracles, and did so throughout His earthly ministry. He healed the sick, made the blind to see, and the lame to walk, solely because of His power, and so that people would listen to His words because they believed that He was God incarnate. He didn’t just set up a magic show, but did these miraculous signs to show that God’s power is infinite, and that He uses that power to care for us His children. He works that same miraculous spirit today, when He turns ordinary bread, wine and water into His Body, Blood and the baptizing water that imparts saving faith into our hearts and souls. In fact, the feeding of the 4000 is a foreshadowing, a prediction of the future events of His earthly ministry, when He reinterpreted the Passover in terms of Himself. No longer would this meal commemorate God’s provision and salvation through parting the waters of the Red Sea; instead, Jesus would reinterpret it in terms of Himself, and the fruits of His Sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. The first, the deliverance from the Israelites, was indeed a showing of God’s tremendous power, and ought not be forgotten. But, His redemption of His people from their sins was so much greater, including all people, not just the Israelites, that it is the more memorable interaction of God with this world. He makes a specialty of inserting Himself into our lives, solely out of His love, mercy, and grace. He has truly done

everything for our salvation. All that's left for us to do is to thank and praise, serve and obey Him!

Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.