



The Feeding of the 5,000 by Francken the Elder

In the Gospel reading today, the crowd looks for Jesus where he fed the 5,000, but they can't find him. They cross the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. and when the crowd finds Jesus there, he says a strange thing to them. "You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs [of the miraculous feeding of your [thousands], but [instead] you are looking for me because you ate your fill of the loaves." (Jn.6:26) Jesus is saying, "Guys, you missed the point! The purpose of my taking those two fish and five loaves and multiplying them in order to feed thousands of you was not to institute the first Happy Hour in history! I didn't come down here from my Father's Kingdom just to set up an all-you-can-eat buffet! Guys, you're missing the point."

We always seem to be missing the point. We always seem to be looking for God in the wrong ways. So Jesus tries to redirect his followers in their search for God. He says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but [work instead] for the food that endures for eternal life." (Jn. 6:27a) Oh, OK! So now we've got a goal in mind for our efforts. Now we see that The Lord wants us to be getting on with something in this life that has nothing to do with the temporal, material things of this world, temporary things which are destined to decay and be no more. Instead, Our Lord insists that his followers work toward something that will last forever, which has nothing to do with this world. Instead, you and I are supposed to be on a civil engineering project which will erect an edifice that can never pass away. Great! So far, so good. We have the right purpose for our efforts identified. Now, all we need is the job description. And that's exactly what the people ask Jesus.

In verse 31, the people say, "What must we do to perform these works of God?" "OK, so what's our job description, Jesus?" And so Jesus tells them clearly, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he [God] has sent." And, at this point, you can almost see the people looking at each other in wide-eyed skepticism. And the crowds are thinking, "Wait a minute! Wait just a dog-gone minute! You're telling us that you are sent from God, himself? Well, not so fast, Jesus! How are you going to prove that?" In fact, the crowd says, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that me may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the mana in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread for heaven to eat.'" (Jn. 6:30-31) So the people are saying, "If you really are the Messiah, the Son of God, shouldn't you be able to perform the same kind of magic trick that Moses pulled off?"

"If you're so great, Jesus, shouldn't you be able to do what Moses did when he arranged for the Children of Israel to be fed by manna in the desert? OK, show us something like that, and we'll know you're the real deal. Then we can believe what you say." And so, just like us, the crowds simply don't get it. Jesus hasn't gotten through their thick skulls and their hardened hearts. At least, not yet.

It's intriguing to ponder what actually happened to Israel in the desert. In Exodus, the Children of Israel have only barely set foot in the desert before they start to complain. In chapters 13 and 14, they miraculously pass through the parted waters of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's army is drowned. And then God brings his children first to the desert Lake of Mara, the waters of which He miraculously changes from bitter to sweet, before guiding them to the beautiful Oasis of Elim in the lush valley of Gharandel, a place with no less than twelve springs and seventy palm trees. (See Ex.15:22-27)

Yet, immediately thereafter, even having been witnesses to this amazing might and loving care that God showers upon his children, the Israelites nevertheless begin to doubt, and to grumble, and to angrily protest against the leadership of Moses. They start wishing, believe it or not, for a return to the slavery of Egypt. "At least there we knew what we were going to die of" they whine. (See Ex. 16:1-3)

Even after such an abundant display of God's might and mercy, when faced with the very first signs of challenge and earthly hardship, God's children begin to complain and doubt. How short is the memory, how shallow the resolve of earthly man! But, in the desert, it's all about trust. That's really the acid test of our faith. When the sun is bright and the path is level, believing is easy. But when you're wandering in the desert, it's there that you learn to trust in God, to cherish the comfort of His guidance.

If you go on just a little in the passage for this morning from Chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle talks about people who live in darkness. It is a darkness, Paul says, which comes from the futility of their own minds.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the unbelievers do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. (See Eph.4:17-19)

And this darkness happens because these people have become alienated from God, and from that trust which comes from true Christian faith. You see, the lost souls in Ephesus, and indeed the lost souls of Jacksonville may very well have been looking for God. But their search has been futile. The truth is, as long as we are unwilling to look **within** ourselves, we'll never really find God. As long as we of this "enlightened and scientifically informed" age refuse to examine deeply our own souls – until we can admit that we are **spiritually** bankrupt, desperately in need of transformation, as long as we refuse to confront that truth, we'll always be looking for God in all the wrong places. The Collect for today freely admits that should God not take pity on us, we are truly lost. Right in 1549. Right in 2018.

But making that kind of honest self-evaluation means we have to be willing to admit that we are all in need of fixing. That kind of truth requires us to come face to face with the fact that, yes, sin exists, and is alive and well within us. But we of "the enlightenment" would rather not go there. We would rather join the lost souls of Ephesus, and dwell in the darkness of alienation from God, simply because we refuse to admit that we actually, desperately need Him in our lives. We refuse to put our faith and trust in the only being in the entire universe who has never lost a single sheep from his rightful fold. What a tragic play with a pathetic and perverse ending, simply because we refuse to admit our desperate need to find within ourselves that faith which The Lord of Love through the mighty power of His Holy Spirit is longing to freely give us. How crushingly sad!

Not only is this kind of absolute trust in God the bedrock of Spiritual revival, it's also the source of great wisdom. An oft-quoted statement of Christian theology, which has come down through the ages from spiritual giants such as St. Augustine, and Anselm of Canterbury, and Thomas Aquinas is, "I believe so that I may understand." The real knowledge in this life, the kind of knowledge which can be applied in the form of wisdom, the knowledge which brings immense blessing to ourselves and to others is actually based on trust.

We enroll in a chosen school or university because we **trust** that this particular institution of learning will remain faithful to its high academic standards.

There are men and women, people we know, who choose to invest years even decades of their life in service to this country, because they **trust** in the ideals this society proclaims; they **trust** in our nation to pursue those standards. So they defend this county, sadly sometimes at the cost of their very lives. Because they **trust**. The entire progress of the human race is based on **trust**. Any advance in knowledge comes only after establishing a system of beliefs on how the world is seen. And that entire system of beliefs, the very alphabet on which all knowledge is founded, any belief-system is based on our **trust** in it.

Instead, our modern society has become one of skepticism. Secular America wants to convince you there is no such thing as absolute truth. The concept of sin is a joke, and each one of us is a law unto himself, since truth depends exclusively on how I see it. Our society only believes in the wisdom of **not** trusting, in **not** admitting any form of clear right or wrong. And secular America certainly doesn't believe in trusting anything as ridiculous as God.

Good people, the real proof of God's work in our world is found in the absolute faith to be had from the presence of Christ in the transformed life of the believer. And it is such an easy proof to have! It only requires us to admit our frailties and our need for the grace of God, won for us all through that precious blood shed on the Cross by the Lord of life and love. All we need do is invite him into our broken lives, to enter in and fill our empty hearts. It is Jesus, the very presence of the Son of God who is beginning and the end of all our lives. He is the full measure of Christian faith. He is the real bread of heaven, that blessing which is to be accepted, believed, partaken, and consumed if the children of God are to have the full measure of heaven. At the feet of Jesus, you and I receive that trusting peace that truly passes all understanding. By the hand of Jesus, you and I are gifted righteousness and reconciliation with God in this world and eternal life with the Father in the next. That is the abundance in which our feast truly lies. Yes, the Psalm was right. He spreads a table before us, even in the skepticism of those enemies who would deny us this repass.

And all we need do to come to the banquet table , to receive this glorious bread that comes down from heaven, all that is required for us to receive the immense blessing of Our Heavenly/Father is to believe and to trust in The Lord. ...Especially...**especially** when we're wandering in the desert. JWB+ 07-30-18