

Sermon for Evening Prayerⁱ

The Seventh Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons: ⁱⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of Micah.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan [**BEH-shan**] and Gilead [**GILL-ee-add**], as in the days of old. According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew [**show**] unto him marvellous things.

“The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.^{iv}

“In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat

that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

“And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha [*Dall-muh-NEW-thuh*]. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.

“Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “When I brake the five loaves among five thousand,^v how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand,^{vi} how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven.”^{vii} In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction:

Most Christians, of even the most casual sort, will recognize the story of the miracle Jesus Christ performed when He multiplied a handful of loaves of bread and a few fishes to feed thousands of men who had gathered on a hillside in the country to hear Him preach. If the worshipper has only a little bit more commitment than that, and therefore has several times heard one or another of these accounts read in Church and preached upon, then he or she will probably know that

this is the only one of Our Lord's miracles that appears in all four of the Gospels, that is, in all three of the Synoptics^{viii} as well as in St. John.

In fact, although most will not recognize this, among those four Gospels, there are actually *six* accounts of nearly, but not quite identical miraculous feedings.

IV. Theme:

Even someone who has only as much experience with the Church's annual cycle of lessons as we have been describing may well also know that these accounts of miraculous feedings of multitudes are *types*, or Biblical precursors, of Our Lord's later institution of the Holy Eucharist. What any but those who are rather regular in their attendance may not know, however, is that there was not *one* such miraculous feeding but *two*, each of which was, in its own way, a sign of the Sacrament that Our Lord would inaugurate at the Last Supper.

V. Development:

The two separate miraculous feedings of multitudes are closely akin but they differ in important respects. In particular, they differ in who it was who was fed, in how many of those people were fed, in where these feedings took place, and in how large the quantity of leftovers was.

The differences in who was fed and in where the feedings took place have great symbolic importance in understanding just what it was that Our Lord was prefiguring. The numbers of those fed and the amounts of food left over are useful clues to help us distinguish the two feedings and to keep them separate each from the other.

A. The first miraculous feeding, the one that all four Gospels report, was the feeding of five thousand Jews and took place on what was traditionally Jewish territory.

When we examine the immediate antecedents to the accounts of Our Lord's *first* miraculous feeding of a multitude, we find that at the time of that earlier miracle, Jesus was "in his own country",^{ix} *i.e.*, that He was in Galilee. This was part of the historic territory of Palestine, part of the "Promised Land" given the Jews by God, and so, of course, the crowds that followed him out of the towns into the country, and who therefore needed to be fed, were Jews.

In this first miracle, five thousand men were fed and Our Lord began His miracle with five loaves and two small fish.^x All four separate accounts of this miracle also state that after the five thousand had been fed, twelve baskets of broken bread and fish were left over.^{xi}

In the symbolic system of the Hebrews, “twelve” represents the Chosen People, the Jewish nation, which was traditionally composed of twelve tribes. In this way, the twelve baskets of scraps that are said to have been left over tell us that, unlike the situation in the later feeding which appears in today’s Lesson, there the men were not Gentiles but Jews. Their feeding, therefore, as a *type* or precursor of the Eucharist, signifies that the Eucharist, once Our Lord established it, and therefore the entire Faith of which that Eucharist was a mainstay, was to be offered first – but not exclusively -- to the Jewish nation.

Thus Jesus Himself, speaking to the Canaanite woman when He initially declined to heal her daughter, described His mission as being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.^{xii} Nevertheless, although she was a foreigner and not a Jew, her persistence persuaded Him to extend His healing mission to her and her daughter,^{xiii} foreshadowing how His new Faith would be taken first to the Jews but, almost immediately, to the rest of the world as well.

B. The second miraculous feeding, the one that only SS. Matthew and Mark recount, was the feeding of four thousand Gentiles and took place just over the eastern boundary of Palestine, in what is now the Kingdom of Jordan.

In the Chapter of St. Mark that immediately precedes today’s Second Lesson, we find that at the time of this miracle, Jesus had journeyed down from Tyre and Sidon, in what is today the Lebanon, had skirted the Sea of Galilee, and was present in the territory of the Ten Cities, called the Decapolis.^{xiv} These were located to the East of the Sea of Galilee in what is today northern Jordan and what was, in Our Lord’s time, long established as historically Gentile territory.

The four thousand men He fed there were, obviously, residents of that territory and were, therefore, themselves Gentiles, not Jews. In today’s Lesson, Our Lord Himself clearly stated that this was a *second* miraculous feeding. Thus He reminded His disciples of “When I broke the five loaves for the five

thousand...’”,^{xv} contrasting that occasion with the subsequent occasion on which He broke “the seven [loaves] for the four thousand....’”,^{xvi}

In this second miracle, four thousand men were fed^{xvii} and that Our Lord began His miracle with seven loaves^{xviii} as well as an indeterminate but small number of fishes. Today’s account, and the similar one in St. Matthew, also state that after the four thousand had been fed, seven baskets of broken bread and fish were left over.^{xix}

In the symbolic system of the Hebrews, “seven”, or “seventy” are metaphors for “a very large number”, used in very much the same way as we toss off “hundreds” or “thousands” or even “a million” when we wish to indicate some indefinite number that is nevertheless very large. Thus St. Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”,^{xx} meaning in effect, “Shall I forgive him many times?” Our Lord answered him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven’,”^{xxi} meaning in effect, “You shall forgive him many, many times”.

In this same way, the seven loaves^{xxii} specified in the accounts of this feeding are an indefinite number, as are the seven baskets of scraps^{xxiii} that are said to have been left over. The use of this particular metaphor for an indefinite but very large number—that is, saying “seven” rather than “twelve”—, when applied to the feeding of these four thousand, tells us that unlike the situation in the first miraculous feeding, here the men were not Jews but Gentiles. Their feeding, therefore, while it is also a *type* or precursor of the Eucharist, is unlike the first feeding in that it signifies that the Eucharist, once Our Lord established it, was to be, and is to be, food not just for the Jewish nation but for the entire population of the world.

In other words, this miracle symbolically and prospectively foreshadows the “Great Commission” that Jesus conferred on His Apostles and disciples just prior to His Ascension, when He charged them to go out and convert the world to faith in Him.^{xxiv}

C. From Christ’s first feeding, that of five thousand Jews, twelve baskets of food were left over. From His second feeding, that of four thousand Gentiles, seven baskets of food were left over.

The easiest way to distinguish these two events at a glance is to look at the number of containers of leftovers. In the first feeding, of the five thousand Jews,

there were twelve baskets of scraps left, one basket for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the second feeding, of the four thousand Gentiles, there were seven baskets of scraps left, symbolizing the large but indefinite population of the world.

This mnemonic [*knee-MON-ick*] key is really very simple: first twelve baskets for the twelve tribes, which means that first the Jews were to be fed, then seven baskets for the second multitude, which means that thereafter the non-Jewish world was to be fed.

VI. Conclusion:

Looking from this *type* or symbol to its *antitype* or the thing symbolized, we find the underlying lesson is that the Christian Faith is directed to feed both its own faithful, who are the New Israel, and then, through the ministry and agency of those faithful, is directed to feed the world. Because this feeding is Sacramental in nature, it can only be conducted under the administration of the Catholic clergy, that is, those who stand Sacramentally in the Apostolic Succession.

This is something that no Catholic Christian can afford to overlook and this is the final *raison d'être* [**RAY-zawn dett**] for the Continuing Anglican church movement. Human alterations to a divinely-established institution, such as the Catholic clergy, can only diminish, or even destroy, that institution.

This is why the founders of that Continuing Church movement left their Lambeth-affiliated church Provinces more than thirty years ago and undertook the hard labor of building up new church jurisdictions to carry on two millennia of church structures. In the end, they did this simply to assure that Our Lord would feed them, and those who would come after them, including all whom they might bring to the Faith, with essential *spiritual* sustenance just as He fed those five thousand and four thousand with necessary *physical* sustenance.

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July 18, 2010.

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.”

Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Micah* 7: 14 (KJV).

^{iv} *St. Mark* 8: 1-21 (KJV).

^v *St. Matthew* 14: 15-21; *St. Mark* 6: 35-44; *St. Luke* 9: 12-17; *St. John* 6: 5-14.

^{vi} *St. Matthew* 15: 32-39; *St. Mark* 8: 1-9.

^{vii} *St. Mark* 8: 19-20 (KJV).

^{viii} I.e., SS. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each of whom prepared his overall report using, at least in part, a common body of material about Our Lord's life and teachings. Hence these three are called the "synoptics", or "those who bring the same eye" to bear on the topic.

^{ix} *St. Matthew* 13: 54a (RSV); cf. *St. Mark* 6: 1; *St. Luke* 9: 10 (where the location is identified as Bethsaida, a Jewish city); *John* 6: 4 (where the location is only specified to be "the other side of the Sea of Galilee", without saying "other than what", but where the inhabitants were preparing to celebrate the Passover and so were unquestionably Jews).

^x *St. Matthew* 17.

^{xi} *St. Matthew* 14: 20; *St. Mark* 6: 43; *St. Luke* 9: 17; *St. John* 6: 13.

^{xii} *St. Matthew* 15: 21.

^{xiii} *St. Matthew* 15: 28.

^{xiv} *St. Mark* 7: 31.

^{xv} *St. Mark* 8: 19 (RSV).

^{xvi} *St. Mark* 8: 20a (RSV).

^{xvii} *St. Mark* 8: 9.

^{xviii} *St. Mark* 8: 5; *St. Matthew* 15: 34.

^{xix} *St. Mark* 8: 8; *St. Matthew* 15: 37.

^{xx} *St. Matthew* 18: 21 (RSV).

^{xxi} *St. Matthew* 18: 22 (RSV).

^{xxii} *St. Mark* 8: 5; *St. Matthew* 15:34.

^{xxiii} *St. Mark* 8: 8; *St. Matthew* 15: 37.

^{xxiv} *St. Matthew* 28: 19-20.

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