

We're Here for the Food

The Gospel lesson today is a miraculous story of the power of God working through Jesus Christ. The feeding of the multitude is one of the miracles of Jesus with which most people are familiar. They know about the loaves and the fish. They know about the leftovers and how there seemed to be more than what they started with. But there is a lot more to this story than a casual first reading would reveal. So, let's take some time to see what else might be going on here.

First of all, what is the setting? It is on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. This could be an important detail. The time of year the scripture says is around Passover. This detail is very important and serves as a basis upon which to really dig deeper into what Christ is doing here. Remember Passover is one of the High Holy Days for the Jews. It marks the anniversary of the time when the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt and began their travel toward the Promised Land. What other important event happened around Passover that is equally significant for Christians? If you're thinking, "Last Supper" you are right! Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples in the upper room. During that meal, he instituted the taking of the bread and cup as a memorial to him until he comes again. It is this memorial we re-enact every time we celebrate Holy Communion.

So with the last supper and Holy Communion in mind, let's read on.

John 6:5-11

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him; "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up,

9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

(NIV)

In the original Greek, the word used for give thanks is "eucharistaysas". It is from this word we get the English word Eucharist that literally means to pray a prayer of thanksgiving. In many Christian churches Eucharist is so closely associated with the Last Supper that it has taken on that meaning too. So we see Christ turning the event into a lesson in faith for disciples. First of all he asks about buying food. Then He receives the donation of food from the little boy. Twice in the narrative the point is made that there is not enough food to go around and there is no way to buy it. So then with all the disciples wondering what he's going to do, he has the people sit down. "Then he took the bread and after he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to the disciples." What a wonderful foreshadowing of what Jesus would soon be doing with the disciples one last time. Notice that the people were able to eat as much as they wanted. The scripture also says He

did the same with the fish. So the people who had come because they knew Jesus to be a healer were now witnesses to an awe-inspiring miracle. Little did they know that they were also witnessing a physical representation of what this same Jesus would do for the world spiritually.

Here's a possible parallel. A little boy brought what he had, and gave it all for the good of the multitude. It did seem like it could possibly be enough, but it was. Now consider that Jesus Christ came into the world as one man to save the whole world. He gave everything that he had including his life. It didn't seem like it could be enough. But it was.

So we have a foreshadowing of coming Passover events leading up the last supper. We have a physical sign of the spiritual salvation of the world through one man. Is there more? There could be. It is interesting to note that the word bread occurs more than 300 times in the Bible. It is used as an illustration of victory in a dream. It is part of a miracle in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Jesus Christ is called the bread of life, and the bread from heaven. And when he was born, the bread of life was placed in a feeding trough.