

7.18.2021 Trinity 7 (Mark 8:1-9)

In the New Testament there are several occasions in which the Gospel writers describe Jesus as being moved with compassion. For example, St. Matthew writes about two blind men who sat by the wayside begging, and *“when they heard Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.”* The crowd tried to silence them, *“but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto Him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him”* (Matthew 20:30-34).

St. Mark writes about a leper who knelt down in front of Jesus and said, *“If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean”* (Mark 1:40-41). Mark also writes about a man possessed with many unclean spirits, which went by the name of Legion. This man, unlike the other examples, can't even cry out to Jesus for help, but St. Mark tells us again that our Lord had *compassion* on him (Mark 5:19), and when He'd commanded the unclean spirits to leave the man, they went out, entered into a herd of swine, and ran violently down a steep place and were choked in the sea.

St. Luke writes about our Lord's compassion in a story about a widow in a city called Nain, who was preparing for the burial of her only son. Luke tells us that when Jesus saw her, *“He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.”* Then He said to her son, *“Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother”* (Luke 7:13-15).

Compassion, which literally means “to suffer with” another person, is a word that the Gospel writers continually use to describe the heart of God for His people. Holy Scripture declares the truth that when our Lord looks at us He is *“moved with compassion”* (Matthew 9:36). We see this fact revealed in the lives of countless individuals, and in the way God relates to large groups of people as well. This is the case in the Gospel passage we read this morning, in which Jesus looks at the great multitude of people who've followed Him into the desert and says to His disciples, *“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”* (Mark 8:2-3).

Our Lord was moved with compassion for the great crowd that had followed Him, and just as He provided the healing that two blind men, a leper, a man possessed by demons, and a mother who was burying her son could not provide for themselves, our compassionate Savior, God who suffers with us in every way, would provide for the crowd that had followed Him into the wilderness, the meal that they couldn't provide for themselves.

When you study this Gospel passage, you quickly recognize parallels between the events we read about today and those of the Exodus, when God led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. In both of these historical accounts we find a huge crowd of people, being led by God in the wilderness, who become hungry, and are provided with miraculous bread. On both occasions it is God who provides for His people, yet notice the way that the fullness of God's compassion is manifested in today's Gospel passage. In the feeding of the 4,000, God doesn't reveal Himself as He did in the Exodus, in a pillar of cloud by day or of fire by night (Exodus 13:21), but instead, God reveals Himself to be a Person, a Person who, as the book of Hebrews states, was made like us *“in every way”* (Hebrews 2:17), and because God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, is both fully God and fully human, we can be certain that when Jesus led the people in the desert, He got hungry and thirsty and tired, just as they did, and this truth reveals, once again, that our Lord and God is our compassionate Savior who truly suffers with us.

God miraculously provided for the people of Israel as they walked in the wilderness. God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, miraculously provided for the crowd that followed Him into the desert. Now, as we walk with the Lord through the wilderness of this world, we rest in the blessed assurance that our Savior Christ leads us, loves us, and as He looks upon the people of His Church, all who are striving to follow Him, He is so *moved with compassion* that He feeds us not with manna, and not only with loaves or fish, but with His Body and Blood.

The people of Israel, and the 4,000 we read about today, were blessed with unimaginable, miraculous bread in the wilderness, but that bread couldn't save them from what St. Paul wrote about in our Epistle, *“the wages of*

*sin*” (Romans 3:23), that bread couldn’t save them from *death*, because as miraculous as it was, it was still only bread. You’ll remember the way Jesus stated that fact by saying, “*Your fathers at the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.*” But then, our Lord declared this Truth, “*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed... He who eats of this bread will live forever*” (John 6:49-58).

God fed the Israelites as they journeyed toward the Promised Land with miraculous bread from heaven. Jesus fed the people who followed Him into the wilderness by miraculously multiplying loaves and fish. Now, as we come to Him today, it is His will to perform an even greater miracle. It is the will of our compassionate Savior, who suffers with us, to give us His Body and Blood, the bread that does not perish, but “*endures to everlasting life*” (John 6:27). The same compassionate God who suffers with us, is the One, True God who suffered for us, and He gives us Himself today, that we may be forgiven, healed, restored, and strengthened for our journey home. God does not let His people go hungry in the wilderness. He does not let them *faint by the way*. Instead, our compassionate Savior feeds us with *living bread*. He calls us to Come, Repent, Believe, Be fed, and *live forever*.