

11.24.2024 Sunday Next Before Advent (John 6:5-14)

I've often heard it said, "Where God guides, He provides," and there are many passages in Scripture which reflect that truth. For example, the opening verse of the 23rd Psalm states, "*The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.*" From the first verse, this psalm presents us with a beautiful image of God guiding His sheep, providing for His people, by leading them to green pastures and still waters. Consider also the words of the prophet Isaiah, who said to the people of God, "*The LORD will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land...*" (Isaiah 58:11), and the thought that where God guides, He provides, is powerfully illustrated in the story of the Exodus, in which God led His people with the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. He provided manna in the morning, quail in the evening, and over the forty years God guided them through the wilderness, their clothes and shoes never wore out.

Where God guides, He provides - green pastures and still waters, manna and quail, or as we read in the Gospel lesson today, a miraculous feast of bread and fish. The text we read this morning is familiar to us all. The feeding of the 5,000 is the miraculous account of our Lord multiplying a little boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish, in order to feed a great multitude of people. The Gospel authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all describe the events of that day, and agree that after this great crowd followed our Lord to a "*deserted place*" (Matthew 14:15), our Savior Christ provided them all with not only something to eat, but with a feast. The text tells us that Jesus "*took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted*" (John 6:11). "*And they all ate and were satisfied*" (Matthew 14:20; Mark 6:42; Luke 9:17).

The people were satisfied, but the bread they ate that day didn't satisfy them for long. As you can imagine, the next day they were hungry again, and when they realized that our Lord was no longer there, we learn that the people in this crowd took boats to Capernaum, seeking Jesus, and "*when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not*

*work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:25-27).*

Many of the people who followed Jesus into that deserted place, and were filled with what He called *“the food that perishes,”* continued to follow Him the next day hoping to receive such food again, but instead of performing another miracle that would feed their bodies for a day, our Lord instead sought to point them to the living Bread that would nourish their souls through eternity. *“Do not work for the food that perishes,”* Jesus said, *“but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”* According to our Lord, there are two types of food, one that perishes, and one that endures forever, and as we consider a number of people in this crowd who followed Jesus only to receive what would soon leave them hungry, we can be sure that they’re example is written for us. We must be certain when we approach our Lord that our focus is not primarily bread for today, the bread of this world, but instead, the Bread of Heaven, the food that endures to eternal life.

Where God guides, He provides, and while our Lord guides us through the wilderness of this world, He provides bread for our material, bodily needs, and yet this Gospel text clearly indicates that His greatest desire is to lead us to heaven, and to provide the Divine Bread we so desperately need for that journey. This is seen in the way Jesus spoke to the crowd that continued to follow Him. He spoke about the difference between the manna, the bread God gave to their ancestors to eat in the wilderness, and the Bread that He gives for the life of the world. After declaring, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst”* (John 6:35), Jesus said, *“Your fathers at the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 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”* (John 6:49-51).

There are two types of food, one that perishes, and one that endures forever, and when Jesus identified His flesh as that Bread which endures forever, the crowd murmured and complained and *“quarreled among themselves, saying, How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”* (6:52), and instead of backing

down from such a difficult teaching, Jesus boldly replied to their question, and declared, *“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 My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him... This is the bread which came down from heaven - not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever”* (6:53-56, 58).

Manna, like the loaves and fish that our Lord multiplied to feed the 5,000, sustained life for a while. The bread we eat sustains our life for a short period of time, but God didn't create us in His own image and likeness to the end that we may only live here on this earth for a little while. The Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity didn't take on human flesh, suffer, bleed, and die on the Cross so that we may live here for a few short years. Our Savior Christ came from heaven to earth, lived, died, rose again, and now gives us His flesh to eat in order that we may live with Him forever. Again, Jesus declared, *“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.”*

The question the people asked: *“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”* was answered at the Last Supper, when our Lord instituted, and commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of that His precious death and sacrifice, until His coming again. It was on that night, the night in which our Lord was betrayed, that *“He took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19).

*“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”* A man couldn't. *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26). In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, our Lord gives us His Body. As St. Augustine so boldly stated, *“Christ held Himself in His hands when He gave His Body to His disciples saying: This is My Body,”* and therefore we are to *“Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup what flowed from His side.”*

Where God guides, He provides, and in His house, through hearing His Word and receiving the Sacraments He instituted, God guides us into His holy presence where we abide in Him, and where life is everlasting. God guides us to Himself, and He provides Bread for that journey - the Bread of Heaven, His flesh, the Bread He gives for the life of the world. The knowledge of this truth, Divinely revealed by His grace, leads us to pray: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, “Ever may our souls be fed With this true and living Bread.”