

Feeding the Five Thousand  
8th Sunday of Matthew  
July 30, 2017

One of the images that the Lord used to describe God's kingdom is that of a wedding banquet given by a king or a rich man to which he invites all his friends. When you think about it, it is mind-bending. The infinite God invites us tiny humans to sit with Him. There is something very personal about sharing a meal with family or friends. Here God invites us to have dinner with Him.

The story of feeding the five thousand men with five loaves is one of very few miracles told in all four gospels. The Lord had been teaching for a significant amount of time; people were hungry, there was not enough food or apparently enough food for such a large crowd, but He wanted to feed them anyway, and the result was this miracle about which we read today.

The stories relate to something that I read recently, something from a Greek theologian named Christos Yannaras. He writes that the original relationship of humanity to God was that God fed Adam and Eve. He did not give them a code of conduct so that they might know Him by doing x, y or z. Neither did Adam and Eve learn about God by philosophical exploration, pondering the origins of the universe or the meaning of life. They knew Him because they ate from His garden. God fed them (*The Enigma of Evil*, p. 22).

When St. Paul preached for the first time to the people of Athens, he noted that God "is not far from each one of us; or in Him we live and move and have our being." St. Gregory of Nyssa once wrote this: "The distance between the divine and the human is not physical. ...The crucial factor lies solely with one's free choice."

Yes, we learn about God by contemplating creation, miracles, , the wonders of the universe and so on. Yes, we learn about God by observing His moral commandments and by caring for the least of our brethren. But the first and most important way we learn about God is from direct experience. We turn to Him for spiritual sustenance. He is always present; we turn to Him and He feeds us.

The words of prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," do not adequately express the original New Testament Greek words, "ton arton imon to epiouision," which signifies the bread that we need to exist. Certainly we need physical bread to exist, but we also need spiritual bread for our souls. Recall the Lord's response to Satan when he challenged Him to turn stones into bread, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth." Reading the scriptures is one form of nourishment.

Prayer is another. By this I do not mean the "911" prayer, the prayer that comes when we have exhausted all human sources of aid and call to God in desperation. And I do not mean prayer that comes in the form of telling God what He already knows and then telling Him what to do

about it. What I mean is prayer done on a daily basis or several times a day for the purpose of spending time with God.

Still another form of nourishment involves the sacraments, especially Holy Communion. As the Lord said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6). Can anything match this promise? "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him"

In St. John's rendering of this miracle, the people pursue Jesus afterwards. They had experienced an exceptional blessing and wanted more. That should be our relationship with God. When we speak about God, we need to speak about how He feeds us.

I say all of this for two reasons. The first is that it helps me when I pray or when I think of God to focus on the thought that God wants to feed me. I turn to Him in order to be fed. The second is that I think that so many people, so many of us who call ourselves Christians, are starving today, starving not physically but spiritually. We do not take the time to feed our souls. I began by mentioning the heavenly banquet. The parable of the banquet describes how those who were invited were too busy to come; they had other, "more important" things to do. Much of what ails us is due to poor spiritual nutrition.

The Lord had no problem feeding five thousand with five loaves of bread. He does much more than that, if we ask Him to feed us.

Fr. Stephen J. Callos

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Text:

Matthew 14:14-22

At that time, Jesus saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.