

**8<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST,  
JULY 9/22, 2007**

**I CORINTHIANS 1: 10-18**

**ST. MATTHEW 14: 14-22**

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

**Gospel** *And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

Christ's Leaving For A Desert Place Apart

The Lord had left by sea to a desert place because He had learned of Herod's beheading of John the Baptist and what Herod had been saying about Him "that Jesus was John"<sup>1</sup> (note: Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, a son of the infamous Herod the Great). He teaches us "not to subject ourselves to trials openly". Herod believed that Christ was John the Baptist, who had been resurrected. The Lord wanted to avoid Herod detaining and killing Him since such an event would have been premature, (His Passion time had not arrived). If the Lord had been captured by Herod, He would have been 'forced;' to rescue Himself. If He had done so, people would have doubted He had taken flesh, become incarnate, and thought He was a kind of phantom.<sup>2</sup>

It was for this reason that Christ departed in a manner befitting a man after hearing (about John's death); thus did He arrange things in His own way; as God He knew all things and had no need to

flee. Christ, then, departed; He departed not into a city, but into a desert place, so that no one would follow Him.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord also left “to a desert place apart” to do the miracle with the five loaves of bread.<sup>4</sup>

Christ didn’t want anyone to follow Him, but this didn’t work out; the people came anyway without regard to the dangers posed by Herod who had beheaded John. This demonstrated their great faith as well as following Him on foot and without any food. He rewarded them by “the healing of their sick and infirm” showing His compassion and mercy for them.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Setting For The Miracle Of The Loaves

In the evening the people remained with Christ even though they were hungry. Their desire to hear Him speak exceeded their hunger pangs. The Lord says to the Apostles Give ye them to eat not because He is ignorant of “the Apostles’ poverty and deprivation” but so when they came back to Him with we don’t have enough, He could work the miracle without it being seen as a vainglorious move on His part. Thus, when Christ made His move to feed them, it was from necessity not out of “a love of fame or a desire to please men”.<sup>6</sup>

#### Bring ME The Loaves

There were only five loaves and two fishes. How is it possible for those loaves to be multiplied and feed “about five thousand men, beside women and children”? Well, it isn’t possible in our secular world, where rationalism rules the day. But **anything** is possible with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! We must have faith in Him as He has faith that we are worthy of the spiritual opportunity He is offering to us – eternal life with Him! The Apostles had very little, not even enough for themselves; yet, they “gave it all to the people”. The Lord multiplied the few loaves to obtain a plenteous supply of them, much more so than was actually needed. We can learn from this that the little we have to offer is “multiplied by God’s blessing and grace”.<sup>7</sup>

Christ seated the multitude on the grass “to teach us humility and simplicity”. He meant to illustrate that there is an alternative to sleeping on beds and couches. He looks upward to His home, heaven, and blesses the five loaves in order to instruct the people that

He is not an enemy of God, but that He came from the Father, from heaven; also, to show us that when we come to the table we should bless and thank God, Who gives us food; we should invoke a blessing from heaven upon ourselves and (only then proceed to) eat.<sup>8</sup>

## Spiritual Discussion Of The Miracle

Christ blessed, broke and gave the loaves to His disciples for distribution to the people. Giving the loaves to the Apostles, He “honours them for their closeness to Him” and so they don’t forget the miracle occurring through their hands.<sup>9</sup> Imagine there were only five loaves! If you can’t accept this, your faith has failed you:

After Christ had broken the five loaves, He gave them out, and the pieces were multiplied in the disciples’ hands. A wondrous miracle! The bread lasted until **all** the multitude had been filled, and even **exceeded** what was needed. There were **twelve** baskets full of fragments remaining, so that the twelve Apostles would each carry a basket; their shoulders as well as their hands became servants and witnesses of the miracle. (Christ) also divided the fishes among them, and from these also the Apostles gathered up **left-overs**. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, **beside** women and children (emphases supplied).<sup>10</sup>

Why twelve baskets? So Judas could carry one, remember this miracle and perhaps “not rush headlong into betrayal”.<sup>11</sup> However, Judas “being ungrateful, foolish and unjust, forgot (about the miracle) and betrayed the Master”.<sup>12</sup>

The Lord multiplied both loaves and fishes to demonstrate He is in charge, “the Creator of earth and sea”. Whatever we eat is owed to God. He worked the miracle in a barren place not close to any town to stop allegations that he bought the bread.<sup>13</sup>

The comments above sketch the literal account of the miracle.

### Another View

Blessed Theophylact points out that there is another “spiritual sense” (allegorical) that we can understand this miracle:

When Herod cut off John the Baptist’s head, this action demonstrated that Herod rejected those who prophesied of Christ, like John “who was the head and chief of the prophets”. Jesus then withdrew to the barren place “to the nations who were desolate without God,” healing the “sick in soul” and then feeding them.

The five thousand are those who are sick in the five senses and who are healed by the five loaves. Since the five senses are diseased, there are as many poultices as there are wounds. The two fish are the words of the fishermen. The one fish is the Gospel and the other the Epistles. **Some** (emphasis supplied) have understood the five loaves to signify the Pentateuch of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.<sup>14</sup>

The Apostles lifted and carried twelve baskets for whatever we, the people, can't eat, that is, understand, and the Apostles accepted and understood. Allegorically, the phrase "besides women and children" meant "that a Christian man, woman, or child, must not in any way be childish, womanly, or unmanly".<sup>15</sup>

### Leaving Humbly

The Lord then sent away His disciples by boat *to go before Him unto the other side* whilst He send the multitude packing as well. He sent them away so they would not follow Him and "He appear to vaunt in His powers".<sup>16</sup>

In our own lives, we should practise the same faith as the multitudes showed in following the Lord without concern for Herod's ire, on foot, and without food. God will provide. They received His reward of healing expressed in His compassion and mercy. We can too if we throw ourselves at His feet and on His mercy.

Let's copy the Lord's humility in our daily lives and in our good works. Christ avoided working miracles for show. He fed the people here out of necessity, not seeking notoriety. If we give gifts and/or endowments to needy folk, consider doing it anonymously. This would seem to be in the spirit of humility and avoiding vainglory.

Let's also emulate the Apostles who gave all to the people and had little for themselves. We can learn from the multiplication of the loaves and fish that our little offering to Him will be multiplied by God's blessing and grace. Our help from the Lord will be disproportionate to our input.

Believe in Christ and His authority and power. Today's Gospel is not a parable that didn't actually occur. The Lord teaches with such parables, but the multiplication of the loaves is not one of them. This is not an allegory. It happened!

Be humble and have simplicity. The Lord will provide for His sheep.

**Be one of them!!**

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba), Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, pp. 332-333.

<sup>3</sup> *id.*, p. 333.

<sup>4</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 333.

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<sup>6</sup> *id.*, pp. 333-334., and see also to the same effect Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, see pp. 334-335. (and in agreement, Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 124.)

<sup>8</sup> *id.*, p. 335.

<sup>9</sup> *id.*

<sup>10</sup> *id.*, p. 336.

<sup>11</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>12</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>13</sup> *id.*

<sup>14</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> *id.*

<sup>16</sup> *id.*, pp. 125-126.