

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today in the Gospel we pick things up with Jesus in the region of Galilee. Remember, He had fed the multitude with the sign of the loaves — we talked about that from Mark, but John covers it, too. Then Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee by walking on the water. John talks about that, too. Of course, I didn't preach on the Gospel last Sunday. In that lesson, the crowd that had been with Jesus noticed that Jesus was no longer with them, and they followed after Him, finding Him in Capernaum on the other side of the sea.

In this way, Jesus began His conversation with this crowd in what is called His Bread of Life discourse. He began by scolding them a bit. The crowd followed Him, Jesus told them, "*because [they] ate [their] fill of the loaves*" (John 6:26). They had seen the sign; they recognized Jesus as "*the Prophet*" foretold through Moses "*who [was] to come into the world*" (John 6:14); but "*his own people did not receive him*" (John 1:11), not as Messiah, not as Savior. They wanted to make Him a bread king.

Jesus corrected their muddled thinking. "*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 6:27). As interested as Jesus was in having mercy and satisfying the people's physical hunger, Jesus was even more interested in their eternal salvation, in their eternal life. As St. Paul would later proclaim: "*If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Cor. 15:19-20).

Thus Jesus would later say, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10); and shortly after that, "*I give them eternal life*" (John 10:28), for "*[i]n him was life*" (John 1:4), as John testifies at the beginning of his Gospel. In fact, God gave His only Son that we "*might not perish, but have eternal life,*" and that by believing in Him (John 3:16). "*This is the work of God,*" Jesus said, "*that you believe in him whom he has sent*" (John 6:29). God the Father sent Jesus Christ our Lord Himself, who came "*down from heaven [to give] life to the world*" (John 6:33).

At the same time Jesus cloaked this teaching in a figure of speech. It makes sense. Jesus had just fed the people by multiplying the five loaves of bread. The people themselves made the connection: "*Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'*" (John 6:31). That recalls Old Testament language, from the Psalms and like this spoken by the Levites: "*You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger*" (Neh. 9:15).

Here Jesus uses the figure of bread: "*the bread from heaven*" and "*the true bread from heaven*" (John 6:32), "*the bread that came down from heaven,*" "*the*

*bread of God*” (John 6:33), “*the bread of life,*” “*the living bread that came down from heaven,*” “*the bread that I will give for the life of the world.*”

It’s a metaphor, to be sure, and the comparison is easily understood. Just as man eats physical bread to sustain physical life and to empower his physical body for his daily labors, so must man eat of the spiritual bread that gives spiritual life and empowers us spiritually in our bodies to do the hard spiritual work that God has given us to do — as St. Paul talks about: “*put[ting] away falsehood, ... speak[ing] the truth ... not let[ting] the sun go down on [our] anger ... labor[ing], doing honest work with [our] own hands ... shar[ing] with [others] in need. ... [not] corrupting talk ... [but talk that] is good for building up ... [putting away] all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander ... along with all malice. [Being] kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*”

But it’s more than a mere metaphor. Jesus points to Himself as the fulfillment of the manna God gave to Israel and the loaves that He miraculously multiplied. He is “*the true bread from heaven*” (John 6:32) given by the Father, for this “*bread of God*” is a he. He, “*who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,*” is this true bread (John 6:33). He is “*the food that endures to eternal life*” (John 6:27).

“*I am the Bread of Life*” Jesus said. “*I am the bread that came down from heaven.*” “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*” For all of this, the Jews began to grumble about Jesus. “Who does he think he is? We know him. We know his father and mother.” They thought they did ... but they didn’t know Him for who He truly was.

They knew a bit of His humanity, but they didn’t even have that exactly right. To be sure, Jesus received His human flesh from His mother, but they thought Joseph was His father; they were wrong. No, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His true Father was the One who sent His own Son down to earth from heaven — the eternally begotten Son, begotten not made, who in the fullness of time was born of woman (Gal. 4:4).

God sent His Son as the Bread of Life into our mortal flesh that He might give His life for the life of the world — His “*flesh*” baked in the oven of mockery and ridicule, scourging and suffering, thorns and nails, cross and death, His flesh sacrificed as a public sin offering to atone for the sins of the world, offered up to redeem the sinful creation by His perfect flesh and blood.

And then almost shockingly, Jesus says eat of it. Eat of it, and you won’t die. Eat “*this bread*” and you “*will live forever.*” I say “shockingly” because the Old

Testament public sin offering was not eaten, but completely burned up (see Daniel Brege, *Eating God's Sacrifice*, 210-15). But we are invited to eat of this sacrifice.

Indeed, what does one do with bread but eat it? And so, what is this eating that Jesus invites us to but coming to Him and believing in Him? “[W]hoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Jesus surely cares about our temporal life; but He came to give eternal life to those who keep on coming to Him and believing in Him ... we might say, who keep on returning to Him in contrition and believing in Him who is “*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,*” who is “*ready to forgive*” (Joel 2:13; Neh. 9:17). These are the ones to whom Jesus promises everlasting life — “*whoever believes has eternal life*” — and to these He says, “*I will raise [them] up on the last day.*” These are the ones of whom it is said: “*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; ... For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*” (Rev. 7:16-17).

Of course, God is superabundant in His grace, and His Son has given His church a meal to eat not just with the ears and heart, but with the mouth and the heart. I’m speaking, of course, of the Lord’s Supper. Here at church the Bread of Life Himself comes down to serve us in these humble elements of bread and wine. Here we receive His grace. Here we eat the body and blood of the once-sacrificed Jesus and are forgiven. Here in this Sacrament we are assured of life and salvation, not without faith, but believing Jesus’ words: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin,” for these words “require all hearts to believe” (Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar).

Therefore, look to the Lord for your daily bread needs. Recognize Him as the giver of “*every good gift and every perfect gift*” (James 1:17). Trust that God will supply what you need to support your body and life. But look to the Lord Jesus especially for your spiritual needs, for your strength to walk in love as Christ’s beloved children, for your refuge in times of trouble, as your light in the darkness — your comfort in your grief, for your hope not just for this life but for eternal life. For the Father has drawn you to Jesus, and this is His will: that you “*look[] on the Son and believe[] in him.*” Therefore, trust in Him and be assured that you “*have eternal life, and [Jesus] will raise [you] up on the last day.*” God grant it ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.