

Laetare
11 March, Anno Domini 2018
St. John 6:1-15
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The ten devastating plagues weren't enough. Walking right through the middle of the Red Sea on dry ground surrounded by giant walls of water wasn't enough. The pillars of fire and cloud weren't enough. The hearts of the Israelites just weren't satisfied, couldn't be satisfied. At the first sign of discomfort they did what comes so naturally to us all - they grumbled. Though, in their cowardice, they went after Moses and Aaron, the truth of the matter was that their complaint was with God. He was a liar. He brought them out under false pretenses, just so that He could starve them in the wilderness.

And let's not kid ourselves. The Israelites knew God's promises. They knew that God had promised the patriarchs since Abraham that He would give them the land of Canaan. They were right in the heart of God fulfilling that promise. More than that, they knew that God had promised to deliver the whole world from its slavery to sin and death. But their hearts were so consumed with selfishness that they didn't care about that. They didn't care that God had just saved them from their lives of miserable, pointless toil, from the lashes of the slave drivers' whips. All they could think about was the fact that they didn't have any food right then and there. No thought given to what God had just done for them. No thought given to what God had been doing for His people since the beginning. Only "God failed because I am hungry now, I don't have what I want, now."

Dear baptized of God, you are children of promise. You are living in the fulfillment of God's promise to your father, Abraham, to give him children of faith more numerous than the sand on the sea shore and the stars in the heavens. You have been set free from Satan's tyranny because the whole terrible impossible burden of building a righteous life out of your unrighteous works has been taken away from you. Your Savior Jesus Christ has lived a perfectly righteous life in your flesh and in the waters of Baptism given that righteousness to you. He has done all the work demanded of you, He has perfectly served every last demand of the Law.

Why then do you grumble? Why do you allow your heart to be weighed down with worry and anger? Why do you doubt that Christ has, indeed, paid the whole debt of your sin, leaving Satan and his demonic host drowned and dead in the Red Sea of Holy Baptism? Why do you fear that even a single crumb of the bread you need this day will be withheld from you when you sit at the Father's table and from the holy altar feast on the true Bread from heaven which gives life to the world? Why do we try so desperately to gather up more than our heavenly Father gives as though He won't give exactly what is needed tomorrow just as He has every day in the past?

Repent. There isn't a single thing in this life or in the life to come that your heavenly Father won't supply to you. Stop measuring what you have as Andrew and the disciples measured them. Stop trusting in the gift and trust instead in the good and gracious Giver of the gift. Trust in the one who can (and often does) bring forth the greatest blessing from the weakest and most insignificant things. We only call Him a liar when we grumble and worry.

Your worries are completely unfounded unless you're afraid that God won't fill your belly full with the same worthless mammon as the world gorges itself on. If that's what you want you've come to the wrong place. No good father gives his children what is harmful just because they want it. The good father gives the good gifts even if the children don't know that they're good at the time.

And see how generously the Lord gives! The crowds in the wilderness ate until they were completely satisfied. No one left saying "I'm still hungry." There were massive amounts of leftovers from what began as five loaves of bread and two small fish. His response to the people's need wasn't measured. He provided in super abundance. Do you doubt that He will do the same for you, His beloved child? Do you think that He is suddenly, in your case, unwilling or unable to take the gifts that He has already given you and make them more than enough to care for you? The same Christ who loved those crowds and fed them, loves you and will feed you. Nothing has changed. You have needs and the Lord will meet them - all of them, every time.

Only, do not be like the Israelites who, even as they stooped down to pick up the manna they didn't bake and the quail they didn't hunt, still refused to

believe that God is gracious and would meet their need the next day. Greed is simply another word for unbelief. A refusal to believe that the daily bread before us is enough. We must have more because we can't be sure that God won't change His mind tomorrow.

Be sure of this - the Lord God does not ever in Scripture repent of His mercy. He may repent of His wrath and judgment, but never His mercy. He will not change His mind and suddenly deny who He is. He will not keep from you your daily bread nor will He keep from you the forgiveness poured out to you in your Baptism. We are the ones who are constantly so fickle. We are the ones who believe the promise one minute and turn around and doubt it the next.

Do not be like the foolish Israelites who were prepared to throw away their salvation for the meat pots of Egypt. Do not allow dreams and fantasies about how wonderful the things and relationships of this world are to deceive you into forsaking the good gifts that are set before you in God's Word and the precious sacraments. The world can offer you absolutely nothing, other than, perhaps at best, temporary pleasure and even that comes with a steep cost - falling down and worshiping at Satan's feet.

You were once slaves - slaves to sin, slaves to the flesh, slaves to reason, slaves to pride and unbelief. But you have been set free. You have been drawn out of Egypt into the wilderness of the Christian Church where the richest of all feasts is set before you - the true Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Only do not return to Egypt. Do not trade this rich feast for the pleasures of the world and the company of those who confess either publicly or secretly a false God. The fleshpots of Egypt are fleshpots filled with nothing but death. Turn away from them and feast on the rich food which Christ, your Lord and Savior provides.

Rejoice! Rejoice in the good Father who, without fail, sees your needs and gives good gifts before you even know to ask for them. Rejoice to be here in the wilderness away from worldly pleasures. This Jerusalem that is above, the Holy Christian Church, is where sinners are consoled with the life-giving Word of God and the miraculous manna of the Flesh and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here consciences nurse on the abundance of God's mercy which will never come up short or fail to satisfy the heart and soul that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Rejoice, for the Lord your

God has seen your need and, in His abundant compassion, provided all that is necessary for you.

In the Name of +Jesus.