

LAETARE (LENT 4)

March 26 2017

Old Test: Ex. 16:2-21

Epistle: Gal. 4:21-31

Gospel: John 6:1-15

Standing..

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we are born, we must eat.

And we must eat food throughout our lives.

It's common sense—goes without saying.

But when we are born again—born from above,
we must eat a different food.

This is why our Lord said, "Man does not live by bread alone."

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting..

You see it quite often in movies and on television..

Some investigator, some researcher has procured a wall in their home or office..

Upon it they have plastered from floor to ceiling
dozens of

newspaper clippings,

pictures,

and computer print outs..

Then, taking red string—(it's always red
string)—

they pen it in one place and stretch it out.

They pen it here, and pen it here, and pen it
here,

until this touches that, and that touches
this,

and all the various strings

lead to one place.

This is how we might view our gospel text for this morning.

This miraculous feeding is not to be viewed in isolation,

nor is it to be merely an example of Christ's power.

For it takes us back to the Passover meal—

of what that meal meant and why it was instituted.

It's connected to Psalm 23,
of a Good Shepherd leading His sheep
to lie down in green pastures.

Another red string connects this feeding to when Jesus says
He's the Bread of Heaven.

And yet another string is connected to when He multiplied
the flour for Zarephath's reluctant widow.

Our wall is covered with Biblical references and stories,
and all the strings—
all those loose ends—
connect directly to our gospel text.

I mean, there's a reason why this account is recorded
in Matthew, in Mark, Luke and John.

And though I'd love to look at every one of the connections,
it is my joy as well as my burden
to point out only a couple.

The first connection is obvious. It's our OT lesson.

You know like I do, that the ancient Israelites were a bunch of
grumblers—

Our OT lesson mentions the fact that they were grumblers 8
times.

You'd think after being delivered from Egypt,
the Israelites would've learned to fear, love and trust
God.

But they didn't.
Neither did they trust their pastors,
Moses and Aaron.

They demand, "Give us bread and meat—we'll trust in *that!*"
And the Lord does so,
graciously giving *daily* bread,
with the promise of more tomorrow.
So like little birds,
they go out each morning to gather what God
provided.

But the command was to live day-by-day.
"Let no one leave any of it over till the morning."

What? "Forget that Moses;
there's no guarantee any of this "bread" will be here
tomorrow.

It's better to save it—hold some back."

So instead of believing God's Word, they gather
more.

Which rots.

The ancient Israelites were a tough crowd—
a stiff necked people, indeed.

God disciplined them when they rebelled,
and forgave them when they repented of their evil.

We follow now our red string from manna in the wilderness to
Jesus,
whose been teaching people all day long.

Mark is the only one to tell us, that to Jesus,
this gaggle of people were like sheep without a Shepherd.

It's not that they were leaderless.

They had an Emperor, a governor, synagogue rulers,
even Pharisees.

But they had no one to teach them spiritual truth.
Jesus was willing
and He would guide them into all truth
showing them the path of eternal
salvation.

So at the end of the day,
the apostles ask Jesus to dismiss the crowds
to go back to the city and get food.

But Jesus' plan is to feed them—to feed everybody.

Not because they were starving or because they couldn't
afford it.

The food was to point to something much greater.

Jesus will even say, "Your forefathers ate bread
and died but He who feeds on this bread—(referring
to Himself)—will live forever."

Yet before making that spiritual switch,
Jesus turns to Philip, asking him, "Where shall we buy bread,
that these may eat?"

The text tells us it's a test.

A test Philip royally fails.

How should Philip have answered Jesus?

Well, he should have looked at our board,
 and followed the red string
 which stretches back to God providing manna in the
 wilderness.

Philip should have said—
 "Jesus, You're God in the flesh...
 You can feed the people with manna—bread from
 heaven."

"I mean, You make wine from water..
 You calm wind and wave,
 You tell demons to flee,
 people are healed at Your Word..

What You did for our forefathers, do it
 again."

But that's not what Philip said, is it? Nor would we.

Philip got out his pencil (lick), and started calculating.

Philip would have been a good Lutheran,
 for he's tighter than bark on a tree.

So after adding it all up (carry the 1),
 Philip's calculation is—

"Jesus, bread for all these people is
 impossible."

Not a good thing to say to the Lord Almighty.

Overhearing this, Andrew now gives it a shot.

Andrew looks to what the Lord has given instead of what to
 buy.

He finds the lunch of a Boy Scout, who clearly came prepared.

But in despair Andrew laments,

"What are they among so many?"

Andrew fails too.

Interestingly enough, way back in Numbers, when God tells Moses
 that He's going to give the Israelites meat to eat—Moses says,
 "Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them and suffice for
 them? Or, shall all of the fish of the sea be gathered for
 them?" (Num. 11:21-23) My point is, Moses failed the same "how-
 are-we-going-to-feed-everyone" test.

Jesus says nothing to Philip nor to Andrew—my guess is, He
 doesn't even roll His eyes.

He would simply provide what they couldn't buy,
 couldn't grow,
 what they had not earned or deserved,

and as you know, it would be more than they
could eat.

In that culture, the Rabbi sits to teach while the people stand.

So here, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, invites everyone to lie down
in green pastures.

Our translation says "sit," but the text says lie.

They are to lie down in green pastures and beside the still
waters—

where Jesus prepares a table.

Instead of calling bread into being out of nothing—He uses means—
that being the lad's lunch.

He takes the bread,

gives thanks,

breaks it,

then doles it out to the disciples to
distribute.

The Lord doesn't use angels to
distribute the bread.

He uses fallible men.

And everyone eats.

And as if to underscore the point for the slow of heart to
believe,

twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered.

One for each disciple.

Their "cups," as it were, runneth over.

Thinking back to our board,

we can see how yet another red string stretches from this
scene

straight to Holy Communion.

For, as I mentioned earlier, in this same chapter Jesus will
explain,

that He is living Bread come down from heaven,

that He is manna in our wilderness and,

that He is bread to fill the sin-starved heart,
hungry for forgiveness.

Beloved, that that body of yours...

How do I say this...things aren't looking very good.

Things are wearing out—knees, lungs, your heart.

Gravity is taking its toll.

Your hair is turning grey, and turning loose.

And the truth is you all are headed to the grave because of the wages of sin.

The physical life God has so graciously given and sustains with daily bread is going to come to an end not matter how well you take care of it.

Soon you will pass through this veil of tears.

For the time being, there's only one way to travel through this wilderness. (Viaticum)

It's by way of the heavenly Manna Christ bestows,
which strengthens and sustains you in this life.

FIRST SERVICE [As you receive...]

SECOND SERVICE (The next time you receive...)

...a tiny morsel of bread and a sip of wine,
you are mysteriously receiving the body and blood of Jesus
and along with that His promise of salvation, forgiveness
and eternal life—

His presence with you now and forever.

I know it sounds unreasonable,
just as unreasonable as manna falling from heaven.
Just as unreasonable as Jesus being born of the Virgin Mary,
Just as unreasonable as a Man rising bodily,
physically from the grave after being buried.

Reason is important,
but there are times when reason has to be held captive to
the Word of God.

So, come to the Table—
setting your doubt and unbelief aside.

Come to the Table—
believing the sins which cling to you will fall away.

Rest in the rich green pastures of the Church and be fed with
a bread that you didn't earn,
a bread you cannot buy or make for yourself.

In the Holy name of Jesus, Amen.