

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

“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.”

We continue in this Trinity season with Jesus teaching his people and you are included. This miracle worked by Jesus in Mark’s Gospel, both teaches and comforts you. It teaches you somethings about yourselves and how you think and live in this world in faith toward God and in love toward your neighbor. God has ordered established your life in this way in the three estates of the church, family, and society. Ultimately, though, in this Gospel reading today, your Lord comforts you as you see Jesus had compassion on the people and he has compassion on you.

The reading starts off in a very interesting way and a few things jump out at us. Hear again what St. Mark recorded for us, “In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.’”

Right off the bat, we see something very important in the context of this miracle. This crowd was with Jesus for three days and we hear they now have nothing to eat. Why is that? We don’t know all the details but what we do know is that they were listening to Jesus. They were gathering around him and some of them came from a great distance. They’re not expecting him to give them bread or any type of food for that matter as they sometimes are in other places. No, they are there with the Lord and they don’t have anything to eat. Their primary concern is to be around Jesus and where he is preaching. They are hearers of the word of God, this is who God has called them to be and this is who they are as his people. This is most important vocation in this life.

Let that first part sink in for a moment. Think about in our lives when it seems like if we miss one meal, or it gets pushed later we don’t forget it. Or look at how entrenched we get and caught up in other things in our lives to the point that it seems mind boggling that these people would get to this point. How many of us would be like these people who are with Jesus and that’s what we are concerned about? The other things in life are on the back burner. But that’s not the case, is it? What do we get concerned about? Heaven forbid we’d miss a vacation, a game, work, a meal, or even a doctor’s appointment for the sake of hearing the word of God. People would call us crazy or maybe we even think that way to some extent. Yet, this crowd sure shames us and our lives.

It also shames us, as well, when many of them came from far away to listen to Jesus and we can’t walk a short distance, or drive in a car to hear God’s word. What does that say about us when people had to walk on foot to go hear Jesus and walk a long way? How easily do we forget, neglect, or simply put aside the vocation of hearer of God’s word, this is living in faith toward God.

Still, these people were hungry and needed to eat. So, what does God do? Listen again to those words recorded by St. Mark, “In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, [Jesus] called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.’ And his disciples answered him, ‘How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?’ And he asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ They said, ‘Seven.’”

Jesus acts. He works as only he can do. This account is the feeding of the 4,000. There is a parallel account of this in Matthew’s Gospel. A similar miracle is the feeding of the 5,000 and we have that account during the Lent season. In all these accounts, though, Jesus is taking care of his people. In some, such as the case of 5,000, he

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even tests his disciples before working the miracle of feeding all these people. Regardless, Jesus is taking care of his people by feeding them. He is having compassion on these people for he is their Lord who created them and still takes care of them. Just as Jesus preached to them and they heard his preaching he has saw what they needed and took care of them in the physical needs.

For you, listening to this event in the life of Jesus you see that you are not excluded in this care of the Lord in this life. God still takes care of you even as you pray “give us this day our daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer. God might not be working this miracle like you heard in the reading, but his compassion and his care are still the same. God does this through the various vocations he calls you to in the church, the family, and the world.

As a Christian parent, it’s a humbling thing to be the instrument by which God has compassion for his children. Luther used the term “masks of God” when talking about the giving of daily bread and the like in this world. As a Christian father or mother, you are a mask of God to your children. When you work and put food on the table for your children to eat, this is God feeding your children. It’s not to say you are God, that’s not the case, but your children see God at work in their lives when they are taken care of by you. God is wearing a mask that looks like their father or their mother.

This goes even beyond parents as God uses you in various vocations to take care of your neighbors in whatever shape or form this may be. Doctors and nurses, for instance, are masks of God in healing people as they examine, diagnose, and administer care and give medication to their patients. Firemen rescue and help. Policemen protect and serve. Farmers are masks of God’s creative work as they plant, tend, and harvest their crops. You get the idea. God calls you to always remember this and for what purpose you serve and work in these vocations. Work is good and has its place. You are to work and serve your neighbor living in love toward him.

Even before the fall into sin God gave Adam work to do. In that reading from Genesis, it said, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” For a Christian to think that he shouldn’t work or for him to despise working is sinful. Sloth is sometimes misunderstood as being lazy, but it goes beyond that as the word is acedia. It means apathy, to an extent, but also a genuine just lack of caring or thinking about your place in this world. You’ll also sometimes hear it with the tagline, “the noonday devil.” It’s going through life not considering who you are and what you have been given to do and even putting off what God commands you. The greatest form of this is a sin against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” When someone doesn’t care to hear God’s word he is refusing to live in that place and order God has called him to live and be by virtue of his baptism. It’s the opposite of what you heard in this gospel reading today.

In the estate of the world, God orders society around people working and serving one another in this order living in love toward the neighbor. It starts first and foremost with a husband taking care of his wife as a husband and wife (man and woman united together by God) are the basis and foundation of society. Adam was to take care of and had charge over his wife, Eve. Parents, then, are established and ordered to take care of their children and spirally out from there. You hear a lot in the news, though, about things like equity and whatever the latest buzzword is that day. But something like socialism and communism, are so contrary to Christianity for many reasons. In just simply this case of work, it’s not to say you shouldn’t take care of others and give but what it does mean is that there is indeed different work and classes of this, and it is good and godly. And yes, even having different authority, responsibilities and wages are good too. When someone tries to think they can put all people and all things on the same level and distribute it out what is really created is a living hell on earth. Work is good. Working for the sake of your neighbor is good. Order and structure are good for God is not a God of confusion or disorder. We saw this last week as well when we heard about the 10 Commandments, how God’s law is good and for our good, and Jesus didn’t come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.

Another thing Jesus teaches you is at the beginning of this reading and puts your priorities into focus as you live in this world and how God has established it. Even the vocations you have in this life have a hierarchy or order to them. Listen again to what Mark recorded, “In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, [Jesus] called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.’” Remember the thing about these people? These people were distracted and had other things on their minds and now they need to eat. What distracted them? Jesus and more specifically listening to Jesus teach. They were feasting on his word and now need food for their bellies.

This brings to mind the story of Mary and Martha at the end of Luke 10. Remember that story? “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’”

Martha had Jesus at her house and rather than sitting and listening to him she was distracted and forgot what was important. It’s not to say taking care of things in the house and serving is bad in and of itself but she lost sight of the one thing necessary or needful as some translations have it. Mary, her sister, sat and listened to Jesus. The people in the Gospel reading today were with Jesus three days and listening to him.

Applying this all together, then, you see God takes care of you and uses you to take care of others, but this is not set against or at the expense of listening to Jesus. The Epistle reading speaks about your freedom in Christ now that you have been baptized, as you heard about last week and this Epistle reading is shorting after last week’s reading. St. Paul by divine inspiration wrote, “When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So, what does this mean? As a Christian, baptized into Christ, you have freedom in Christ to listen to Jesus and to serve your neighbor. Both of those things are true. You are a hearer of the word of God living in faith toward God and in love toward one another. Use your freedom wisely as a Christian and not as an excuse or cover up for sin. Also don’t neglect to serve your neighbor in the vocations God has called you to serve. But remember God is a God of order. Put things all in their proper place and realize that everything comes from and is brought about because your Lord is compassionate taking care of your needs of body and soul. Your life in Christ is formed, shaped, and is a fruit of the redemption you have in Christ. Take yourself away from his forgiveness, life, and salvation given to you in the means of grace and you go back into the slavery to sin you were rescued from by him. Not only that but your faith will starve to eternal death. Your prayer, then, is what you prayed a few minutes ago in the Collect of the Day, “O God, whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly implore You to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things that are profitable for us.”

Dear people of God listen to the miracle your Lord did out of his great compassion. “And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied.

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And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.”

The comfort in all of this is Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The same God who created Adam and Even putting them in the Garden of Eden is the same God who fed the 4,000 in the Gospel reading and is the same God who has redeemed you. God will not forsake you in this world or into the life to come. He hears and answers your prayers not because of how hard you pray or how great your faith is, he does this all out of his compassion. How do you know this is true? Jesus is crucified for you. Your sin has been washed away in the waters of baptism. He sends a preacher to you to deliver his forgiveness. The Lord feeds you with his own body and blood given and shed for you. Your sin is forgiven, and you have eternal life. What a joy to have and behold this all today as you sit here listening to Jesus. He has compassion on you. He blesses you. He feeds you. He grants you the new life to live in faith toward him and in fervent love toward one another. He sends you on your way now and into eternity.

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