

Laetare 2024

John 6:1-15 (ESV)

“One of His disciples, Andrew...said to [Jesus], ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?’”

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

Intro: The Lord’s blessings to all of you, dear ones, on this Fourth Sunday in Lent. It may well seem out of place, during this penitential season, for this particular Sunday to be so much lighter and less intense than that of the other Sundays in Lent. It may seem strange for the paraments to be rose-colored and for the emphasis of this Sunday to be one of rejoicing, and reprieve, and even restful satisfaction. What’s this? What is the meaning of these things? After all, the fulness of the Easter season isn’t here yet. So, why does the holy Church see fit to rejoice and find such satisfaction *now* when there’s so much still left to be desired?

Well, as it happens, the Apostle Andrew, in our Gospel text, questions our Savior in similar fashion. The disciples were all with Him and a large crowd in a place where there was no food, and Jesus, wanting to feed the masses seems to think—in typical fashion, of course—that just a few loaves and a couple of fish would suffice. That’ll do it; that will leave them joyous and satisfied. “But,” St. Andrew asks, “what are they for so many?”—which is as much as saying, “Lord, what reason do we have to be rejoicing and at rest when the need is so great? I don’t see how You could possibly satisfy so much when You seem to have so little to give and when there’s so much left to be desired as far as I’m concerned.”

But, dear ones, this particular Sunday we take a step back and recognize that as it was for the disciples and the great crowds back then, so it is for us even now in this way: Jesus is with us; He sustains us and gives us what we need in body and soul—and the Church has never considered this to be just some trite, cliché piece of theology. And I hope you come to see what an impious thought that is. Because for us and all faithful believers, when it comes to true joy and rest and satisfaction—in the end, being with Jesus and having what He gives us, *that’s* what we need the most. And with the good things He gives us now, He would give us true faith and a foretaste of all that’s soon to come.

- I. Again, though, as the Apostle Andrew said, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but *what are they* for so many?” You can almost feel the disappointment and dissatisfaction in his question. Can you not? [//Pause//] It seems ridiculous to think just these things will satisfy so great a desire. What are they? Andrew says this like one of his Hebrew ancestors from of old.
 - a. No doubt, you remember well how the ancient Israelites spoke wandering in the desert when the Lord rained down bread from heaven to feed them. They looked at the bread from heaven and said, “Mah nah?” in Hebrew—Manna. What is it? What is *that*? Is *this* what the Lord would give to feed us, to satisfy so many? Clearly, they expected something different. And how soon was it before they were

thoroughly restless and dissatisfied with what God sent them?

- b. How soon was it before they were at the point of speaking so shamelessly against God and His servant Moses saying, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and water and we loathe this worthless food”—referring to the bread from heaven—the Manna. We loathe it, this worthless food.
 - c. Dear ones, not only is it sinful, but it’s a terrible pathology of the soul to be continually, habitually restless and dissatisfied with what our Lord gives us to satisfy our need. In this condition, we no longer fix our attention on the Lord and the things He graciously gives us, but instead we focus inwardly upon ourselves and the things we don’t have.
 - d. Search your heart and think how often we take for granted the daily bread our Lord is pleased to give us, how ungrateful we often are for everything He provides to sustain us physically day to day,
 - e. The same can be said especially when it comes to spiritual gifts, when our souls feast on the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.
 - f. And if we do thank Him, how often is it perfunctory more than anything, just going through the motions, meanwhile what would really make our hearts rejoice more than anything is money.
 - g. And before I go any further, I would humbly offer you some food for thought, dear ones, and that is this: maybe the Lord knows if He were to rain down money on you, it would ruin you and cause you to be so restless and dissatisfied with the spiritual gifts He gives, that you’d forget the Lord altogether. It is as St. Augustine famously said so many centuries ago, “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and we are restless until we rest in You.”
- II. But as it is, despite our unworthiness, despite our ungratefulness, our Lord continues to give us our daily bread, that we would find rest and rejoice in Him. And above all else, it has satisfied God our Father to give us His own Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, the true Bread from Heaven and the very Bread of Life, Who *gives* life to the world. And we see a powerful image of that in our text.
- a. The ESV translates our Lord as saying, “Have the people sit down.” But the Greek word used means to recline—and this is not just the position of resting and satisfaction but also of feasting.

- b. And Jesus took bread and fish, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and everyone ate and were satisfied—some say there may have been a total of 20 or even 30,000 people. They were all reclining and rejoicing at being fed by our Lord. They all had enough. There was more than enough.

- c. So too, come and feast yourselves today and give thanks, dear ones. Give thanks and feast yourselves on the One Whom the Father gives to sustain you to eternal life, to give you rest, and satisfaction like no other—rejoice and say, “What is this but a magnificent foretaste of the Easter feast to come and of the coming feast in the kingdom of Heaven, which will have no end?” *Laetare*, dear ones, and

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.