

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In the wilderness, the devil tempted the Lord to turn stones into bread. The Lord was fully able to do it, but refused and overcame the temptation. He rebuked the devil by citing the Divine Words of Holy Scripture. The Words with which Christ overcame the devil came from Moses. God spoke through Moses teaching to Israel the reason for their 40 years of desert wandering. The purpose of the trial in the wilderness was to test Israel's heart, to see if they would keep His Commands or not.

So in the wilderness God humbled them, and He fed them with bread that neither they nor their fathers had known. God did so, Moses proclaimed, that Israel learn "that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

As He tested Israel in the wilderness, so now does the True Israel test Philip: "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip answered the Lord's heavenly question with an earthly reply. According to man, Philip was right, of course. It would be prohibitively expensive to feed a crowd so large. So the Lord did what men could never do. He gave them bread to eat that neither they nor their fathers had known. He took five barley loaves and two small fish, and fed what Matthew and Luke report were 5000 men, and the women and children with them.

More than satisfying such a crowd, there were twelve baskets full of barley bread fragments left over. That's how God is. He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. He gives daily bread even to the unjust. He causes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and His sun to rise on both the evil and the good. He desires that men know Him as the gracious Giver of all good gifts.

The problem is, of course, that men take those very gifts and make idols of them. They worship the creature rather than the Creator, the gift rather than the Giver. They take blessings and make mammon from them. Mammon is a creaturely gift that men place between themselves and God. Mammon is a blessing sinfully made into an idol.

That's why the men desired to make Jesus king. They didn't want Him for a god, they didn't want to serve Him. They wanted Him to give them free bread. They didn't fall down and worship. They made miraculous bread into mammon. Their god was their stomach.

Another Biblical example of such mammon is wealth. Men consumed with the pursuit of money turn it into a god they serve. They self-define by their mammon. They look to money for help in trouble, they trust in money, they spend every waking hour in the acquisition of more money.

And that vicious cycle prevents them from looking to God for help or from turning to God. They turn to money. So they are unable to show humility, they are unable to be humble.

But money is not the only gift men sinfully misuse. Good health, physical prowess, intelligence, being well-spoken, being attractive, exceptionally skilled, all these gifts of God men sinfully think are of their own doing. They pridefully take credit for what God has freely given. And what God meant for good, men use for evil.

Those who have less money, those who lack money, sinfully covet it. They make themselves out to be victims, not thankful for what they have, rather jealous of what others have. So by their jealousy they accuse God of being unfair.

So look to yourself, O Sinner. Consider your own life. Which gifts have you freely received for which you have failed to give thanks to God? For which gifts have you taken credit, proudly coming to believe that you have, by your own reason or strength, earned them for yourself?

In pride, by coveting, by placing your trust in the gift rather than the Giver, you have been, as St. Paul writes, a son of the bondwoman, born according to the flesh. And yet Scripture says "...cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

God indeed provides daily bread. But what men meant for evil, God means for good. So do as the Lord invites you to do: seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and God will add to you such as you need. Return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on you, and to our God, for He abundantly pardons.

The King of heaven and earth, the Celestial King, came down from heaven. But He did not come to establish an earthly kingdom. His Kingdom is not of this world. So the world hated Him. The world put Him to death. But His Kingdom is from everlasting to everlasting. He left death in the tomb, and from His death He brings you life. He brings you life by hearing His Word, His Gospel Promise. He brings you life by miraculously feeding your faith. The Babe of Bethlehem, the House of Bread, is the Bread of Life.

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That Word He feeds you this day. He sustains and nourishes you in the wilderness of this world. You hear His Word, read from this Chancel, preached from this pulpit. And by that Word, His Spirit works to give and increase faith.

That is what faith hungers for – Christ publicly read, Christ preached, Christ applied to you in Absolution and Holy Baptism. He is the Food that does not perish. He is the water of which you drink, and you will never thirst again. He makes you a child of the Promise.

As great a miracle as the multiplication of the barley loaves and fish was, He does a greater miracle for you today. With unleavened Bread He gives you His Body to eat. With wine He gives you His Blood to drink. He places Miraculous Food in the hands of His called and ordained servant to distribute to you. And He feeds all of Christendom in the same way.

You eat and drink, and as the Prophet Isaiah promised, you eat what is good, and your soul delights itself in abundance. So rejoice, dear Christian, rejoice. In the violet wilderness of this world, the brightness of the saving Gospel is always there for you.

Christ is the true Bread from Heaven. You hear His Word, you believe, and your soul lives, because you have partaken of the Bread of Life. He who eats this Bread will live forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

