

Trinity VII, 2006
Text: Mark 8:1-9
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

In the beginning there was Life – the Life of the world, God himself. And he freely gave of Himself and made a world of Life, a world meant to live in harmony and joy with him forever. Yes, as God made the world it was good – very good. He made humanity as the crowning achievement of his creation and breathed life into the Man and took the Woman from his side and set them in a Garden of Life. Life was everywhere – in the teeming sea, in the beasts of the field, and especially in Adam and Eve who were even blessed now to give life to the rest of humanity as they were brought together that they might be fruitful and multiply. In the beginning there was Life – the free gift of God.

But then there came sin, and death followed with it. For the wages of sin are death. Adam and Eve denied Life and chose a path that led to death. That is the final meaning of sin as St. Paul tells us. Sin is a rejection of God, who is Life, and thus sin leads to death.

And so before the fall into sin, all was Life, all was God's gift. The earth freely supported its King and Queen by producing their food for them without toil. And this food was meant to sustain them for an eternity – they were never to die. Each meal for them was to be a reminder of ongoing life, the sustaining of a life that could never fail.

But when sin entered in, all changed. Life is rejected in sin; and now death is humanity's destiny. Now the man is cursed – only with toil will the earth now give him bread. What once was freely given must now be extracted with force and labor. Now by the sweat of his brow will the man eat his bread - all because of sin, because of the rejection of Life. What once was a reminder of life, is now a bread of death – coming to us through toil from the dust of the earth, always reminding us that dust we are and to dust we shall return.

And you too are the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve. You too have inherited their fallen nature, their brokenness, and their destiny. You too eat

the bread of death only by the sweat of your brow. There is no point trying to ignore the fact that you are dust and to dust you shall return. And since the wages of sin is death, your mortality is the proof of your sin. And so repent of holding on to the things of this fallen world, these signs of death. How much time and energy you spend worrying about and hoarding wealth and things – bought with your toil, the sweat of your brow, they are but the bread of death. How many relationships have been ruined in arguments over money and houses and cars – arguments over the bread of death.

Repent of all that. Give up on it. For behold the sign that Jesus gives today to these four thousand. It shows that he is Life and that he wishes this Life to be yours. For again it is Eden and the Author of Life freely gives food to his children without toil and without labor. But this miracle of feeding these four thousand people is not an end in itself – for while this miracle is certainly a reminder of Life in Eden, still Jesus gives them here only the bread of death, only lunch for a day. No, as with all his miracles in his earthly ministry, the miracle is not an end in itself. It points to something else. Surely you heard what it pointed to when the Gospel was read – how here Jesus “took the...bread, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples” - sound familiar?

Of course it does – St. Mark is using this language of the Lord's Supper which we know so well to point out to us the meaning behind the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand. It's a prophecy of what Jesus was about to give to his disciples to do for the Church on that night in which he was betrayed. For the four thousand he gave food for the body to sustain them so that they might not faint along the way. In the Lord's Supper he gives food for body and soul so that we can be strengthened in the faith and not faint along the way, the narrow path to our heavenly goal. For the four thousand Jesus demonstrates that he has power over the things of creation, multiplying bread by the power of his Word. In the Lord's Supper, by the power of his Word Jesus makes the bread to be his Body, and though the souls it feeds are countless, still the bread of life is boundless.

And consider now the beautiful poetry of our Lord. He is always undoing the brokenness of the world by turning it upside down and inside out back to the way it should be. For example, since through the woman Eve all humanity fell into sin, so through the woman Mary Jesus came into the world to save us from sin. As Satan once conquered us and led us into death by using a tree, so also God saved us by what St. Paul calls the tree of the cross. And now behold again God's sense of symmetry and his delight in balance: the bread of death – the wheat planted in the ground, harvested with toil, milled into flour, baked in hot ovens, purchased with your offerings from your own toils and labors, this bread purchased with so much sweat from the brow, this bread of death which we offer to God by giving him our tithes and offerings – he now returns to us as the Bread of Life. That is the

meaning of our ceremony of the offering. It is brought forward and presented to God because from these offerings we purchase all that is needed for the Church – including the altar bread.

And what does God do with our bread of death? He turns into the Bread of Life! See how he undoes the curse! See how he fulfills the sign of this miracle of the feeding of the four thousand! Hear Him as He Himself instructs and invites you from **John 6** “[Jesus said]⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” ⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

So if you feel death around you – if your toiling for the bread of death has brought you more hardship than joy, more worry than happiness – if you mourn your sins and want Life – then at your Lord's Word come to the Feast and in your Lord's Body and Blood you will receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. For He himself promises that thus he will abide in you and you will live for ever. Amen.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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