

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus.

“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that he heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.

“And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the Lord: for he hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentyseventh Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

“... Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”
In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today’s First Lesson tells of the *manna* [MAH-nah] God sent to the Hebrews when they faced starvation during their wanderings in the desert after the Exodus from

Egypt. Like dew, this *manna* formed overnight on the ground and the Israelites went out each morning to gather enough to sustain them during the following day. Thus, as far as they were concerned, it was literally “bread” – that is, food – from heaven, miraculously fallen upon them at God’s command.

Theme:

Scripture frequently records events, especially miraculous events, where those events are what scholars call “types”. A “type” is an Old Testament or New Testament event that foreshadows, or foretells, a later New Testament event called the “antitype”. An *antitype* is, at least in its spiritual significance, similar to its earlier *type*.

Where the earlier miracle involves feeding someone, and particularly when it involves feeding a large group, that is usually a *type* for Our Lord’s later establishment of the Eucharist.

Development:

Today’s account of the *manna* is a classic Old Testament *type* of this sort. It is the *physical* feeding of a multitude which, like Our Lord’s two miraculous feedings with loaves and fishes that are recorded in the New Testament, presages the *spiritual* feeding of the whole Church in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

This connection is expressly set out in today’s Second Lesson. There, Our Lord is addressing a group which He reminds should be concentrating not on getting the physical food that sustains biological life but on receiving the spiritual food that sustains everlasting life.

His hearers state that God gave their ancestors bread in the desert, that is, the *manna*. Jesus tells them that what their ancestors received and ate was not the *true* bread from heaven, that is, it could sustain only the body but not the immortal soul. The bread that comes down from heaven and gives eternal life is He Himself: “I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

Those hearers would not know it until after the Last Supper, but He meant that He was to give them the incomparable gift of the Sacraments. He would give them

actual means of experiencing spiritual realities in this incarnate, physical world. They would be able literally to feed on Him, to sustain their spirits, in the same manner as they fed on the bread made from flour to sustain their bodies.

Of course, His gift to us of the Sacraments, and the manner in which those Sacraments operate to our benefit, are miracles. They are also great mysteries, mysteries the results of which we can appreciate but the workings of which we can never know. We can only accept them in faith. Thus God's miraculous provision of *manna* for the Israelites is an appropriate sign and foretelling of Christ's even more miraculous institution of the Eucharist for His Church.

I say "more miraculous" because the provision of *manna* actually involved a physical process to produce a physical result. Just as with the first ten plagues on the Egyptians, or Joshua's leading the Hebrews dryshod across the River Jordan, *manna* made use of natural forces that exist in that part of the world. The weight of modern scientific opinion is that *manna* was the crystallized honeydew of certain scale insects which is still gathered in the region. In the desert sun, its water rapidly evaporates, leaving a sticky solid which is a good source of carbohydrate.

In all these cases, *i.e.*, the Egyptian plagues, the stoppage of the Jordan River, and the *manna*, the miracles lay in God's foreknowledge of the workings of the physical order and His communicating that knowledge to the Israelites' leaders so they could take advantage of that natural order. The Eucharist, however, makes use of physical means to produce a spiritual result, something that could happen only by divine intervention into the physical order.

The miracle of the Eucharist is directly linked to the promise of our Resurrection: "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.... And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Conclusion:

Seeing Christ is thus a prerequisite to receiving from Him both everlasting life and our personal Resurrections. But after Christ's Ascension, no one has been able to see Him here on Earth except in the form He has made available to us, that is, in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Thus if we wish for everlasting life, we must faithfully use the Sacrament of the Eucharist. This is why the XXVIII Article of Religion says it “is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ’s death”¹⁰ and the Catechism says it is “generally necessary to salvation”.

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*The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister
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1 Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

2 Exodus 16:4-15 (KJV).

3 St. John 6:27-40 (KJV).

4 St. John 6:35 (KJV).

5 The first feeding was of five thousand Israelites, St. Matthew 14:19-21, St. Mark 6:30-44, St. Luke 9:10-17, St. John 6:1-13; the second was of four thousand gentiles, St. Matthew 15:32-38, St. Mark 8:1-10.

6 Prior to the interruption of the Nile’s annual inundations by the Aswan High Dam, the river’s flowing “blood” (i.e., microorganisms similar to “red tide”), frogs, lice, flies, cattle murrain, boils, hail, locusts, “darkness” (i.e., a massive dust storm), Exodus 7:19-10:22, were all events that could occur naturally in connection with the water’s annual cycle of flood and recession.

7 Joshua 3:5-4:18. The Jordan flows along a massive fault line, the same fault that is responsible for the Great Rift Valley in East Africa. In the 1920s, earth tremors there collapsed the river’s muddy banks, completely blocking it until the backed-up stream could erode its way through the natural mud dam.

8 God always seems to work with great economy of means, perhaps out of an ethic of stewardship.

9 St. John 6:33 & 40 (KJV).

10 The Book of Common Prayer 608 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

11 Ibid. 580.

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