

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY²

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of Micah.⁴

“Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan [**BAY-shann**] and Gilead, as in the days of old. According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew [**SHOW**] unto him marvellous things.

“The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.⁵

“In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith [**SETH**] unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint

by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

“And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha [**doll-muh-NYOO-thuh**]. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith [**SETH**], Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.

“Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith [**SETH**] unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was delivered at Mass on Trinity VII, for which the Gospel appointed is the same as the Second Lesson at Evening Prayer today.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Micah 7:14-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Mark 8:1-21 (KJV).

⁶ St. Mark 8:4 (KJV).

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

A miracle is not just a magic show. It has a meaning and purpose beyond its ability to mystify. A miracle reveals something of the nature of God and His will for the world. It exposes us to realities beyond what is readily apparent to our senses and our experience.

The miracle story that is the Gospel for today reveals something about human nature as well. That is where I would like to begin. Here is the setting.

Jesus and His disciples were out in a remote part of the country and a great crowd of people had come out to hear Jesus preach. After three days the people were understandably hungry, and Jesus, as I’m sure you know, cares about hungry people. So He shared His concern for them with His disciples.

The immediate reaction of the disciples was to focus on lack of resources: “From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”

How typical! How easy it is, when confronted with a problem, especially if we don’t want to deal with it, to think of all the reasons why we just can’t cope with the situation. It’s easy and it’s also unproductive. It’s not only unproductive; it’s disheartening. It makes us feel like helpless victims.

But Jesus was not having any of that kind of thinking. He directed the attention of the disciples away from what was lacking and focused it on the resources that were there. “How many loaves have you?” He asked.

Suddenly the disciples stopped looking at extent of the problem and began to look at the elements of a solution. They stopped counting people and started counting bread. “We have seven loaves,” they said. Well it wasn’t much, but in the hands of Jesus it was more than enough.

Those seven loaves were probably the provisions the disciples had brought for themselves, and they could easily have kept them for themselves. They could have argued that there really was not any extra. But they didn’t do that. They simply gave what they had to Jesus – not just some of it but all of it, not just the extra, but everything they had, and Jesus offered it to God in thanksgiving.

The Greek word for giving thanks is “eucharitste” and what happened out there in the wilderness is exactly what happens right here when we celebrate Holy Communion. We offer to God through the priest the rather meager resources we have: some bread, some wine, some money. But mostly we offer ourselves, “our souls and bodies.”

God blesses what we offer and fills it with His own divinity so that what receive is far more than what we gave. We offer bread and wine; we receive the body and blood of Christ. We offer money; we receive a building with appointments and a liturgy and a priest and everything else we need to do what we are called to do as a church. We offer our souls and bodies; we receive eternal life.

The association of the Sacrament of the altar with the miracle of the feeding in the wilderness is not original with me. The author of the fourth Gospel makes that association as well. He depicts this event as taking place during Passover and he follows it with the discourse on Jesus as the Bread of Life. This is John’s institution scene, and it enables him to substitute the foot-washing scene for the institution of the Sacrament at the Last Supper.

What Jesus did in the wilderness prefigures what is described in the other Gospels at the Last Supper, and that in turn prefigures the offering up of Himself on the cross. At every communion service we re-enact these events in dramatic form.

But it’s one thing to re-enact the miraculous feeding in the wilderness here in church. It’s another thing to re-enact that scene out there were we live. Out there we tend to focus on our problems and our lack of resources instead of on the needs of others and the resources we have to meet those needs. And I’m not just talking about money. I’m talking about time and energy and experience and training and natural talents and above all the faith that we have, no matter how meager it may be. We have to offer all these resources to Jesus so that He may use them to feed hungry bodies and hungry souls.

Jesus works miracles every day with the meager resources that people place in His hands, and He looks to us to be willing to share those resources with others.

From His throne in heaven, Jesus looks on a world that is hungry for the Bread of Life as well as for the bread that sustains physical life. In His compassion, He looks to us and asks, “How many loves have ye?” Whatever the answer is, He takes what is offered, blesses it, and tells us to set it before the people. That is how we live out the sacramental experience of the altar.

Let each of us do that gladly for the sake of Him who has compassion on us and feeds us with His own body and His own blood.

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August 7, 2011