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in the Season after Pentecost

Of the seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer, the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," is the only request that deals with physical or earthly things. All the other prayers ask our Father in heaven for spiritual blessings. Of course, we need daily bread; we require the gifts that maintain our bodies and lives. In the Gospel for today Jesus encourages us to see the source of our daily bread and realize how he provides it.

First Reading

Exodus 16:1-15

The Lord supplied food in the desert.

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 9:8-11

God provides all we need so we may be generous to others.

Gospel

Mark 6:35-44

Jesus feeds 5,000 people.

Sermon

Mark 6:35-44

Introduction: You never have to wonder when a baby gets hungry. If a baby starts howling you can be sure that its diapers are wet or its stomach is empty. Age doesn't change things. Your four-year old comes home from day care and it's "Mommy, I'm so hungry" and your 12-year-old comes home from soccer practice, and it's "Mom, I'm starving." You pick up your teenager from school and it's "Can we stop someplace? I'm famished." It's not all talk. Your college kid gets home at midnight and you smell pizza coming from the kitchen. You hear the microwave in the middle of the night or you see the ice cream dish when you wake up in the morning. From the moment of birth—well, really even before birth—human beings need and want food.

Along with water, food is a basic element of life. The first thing Adam saw was that the plants God created in the garden were pleasing to the eye and good for food. The first penalty Adam heard after he sinned was that thorns and thistles would make producing food hard and painful. So there are downsides and drawbacks to food. You have to work to grow it, you have to pay to buy it, and you have to cook to make it. There are some foods you don't like and some foods you can't eat and some foods you can't afford. But whatever, we have to eat; we have to ingest nourishment. No appetite? You're probably sick. Bad diet? You'll probably get sick. Won't eat? Probably anorexic. Can't eat? Probably dying.

Jesus wants us to pray for daily bread. And so we do every Sunday in the Lord's Prayer. But there are seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer and only one deals with food. The truth is, Jesus didn't talk that much about daily bread. He said I am the bread of life, but that's a spiritual thing. He changed water into wine and promised to feed the birds of the air. He warned about the dangers of worry and gluttony. But there are only two miracles in Jesus' entire ministry where he actually displayed his desire and his power to provide food for people. The miracles are almost identical. In one he fed 4,000 men with seven loaves of bread and two fish. In another he fed 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two fish. That second miracle is the Gospel for today. It's the only miracle that all four Gospel writers tell and it has some important lessons for people who absolutely rely on food. It answers a question we've all asked hundreds of times in our lives:

What's There to Eat?

1. Things are buzzing all around Jesus. He had sent his twelve disciples out on a missionary trip and they came back with glowing reports. They also came back with growing crowds. It was Passover time and the roads were jammed with Jews heading for Jerusalem. Jesus proposed a get-away, a few days to relax and think. But the crowds caught on and followed. Jesus could see a problem: Where were all these people going to get supper? He mentioned his concern to the disciples and they started thinking about what to do—which is exactly what Jesus had planned.

So now it was late in the day, and the disciples had come up with some ideas. First idea: **“Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”** Reasonable. But it wasn’t what Jesus was looking for. **You give them something to eat, he said.** Philip had been calculating this for a while (We know it was Philip because John tells in his Gospel.) Philip estimated the numbers, figured the cost, and did the math: **“That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”** Reasonable. Jesus wasn’t convinced. **“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”** Andrew (again we know this from John) had been walking through the crowd. **“Five loaves—and two fish.”** So back to the question: What’s there to eat? Not enough. Not nearly enough. Not even close.

That’s what happens when you put people in charge of daily bread. There’s never enough. Not even close. When Martin Luther explained the Fourth Petition, he said, “God surely gives daily bread without our asking, even to all the wicked.” But the truth is that neither the wicked nor the good always get the daily bread God wants to give them. Here in Mequon we can find and buy just about any food we want and fill ourselves with it, but people are starving in Central America and Africa. America is the breadbasket of the world, but sometimes farmers don’t plant to maintain fair prices—and I understand that—but people are still starving. The government helps the poor to buy food, but some of the poor trade their assistance for drugs and liquor. From 1845 to 1852, millions of Irish people died from starvation or malnutrition because a blight destroyed the Irish potato crop. But there’s a deeper story here. The disease arrived from America because of human error. The blight destroyed the entire crop because the Irish planted only one kind of potato; it was the easiest to grow. Of course, they also planted only potatoes. America offered rice, wheat, and corn, but the British Parliament refused to pay for it. The Irish cried, What’s there to eat? but there was nothing to eat because people, sinful human beings, messed up their daily bread.

God warned Adam what sin would do to daily bread. The people of Israel we heard about in the First Reading today weren’t starving. They had food as they started their trip from Egypt; they just didn’t like it. God provided manna and quail, but eventually they complained about the manna and quail, too. Philip and Andrew had no good ideas for feeding the 5,000. Nothing has changed. Sin leads to abuse and waste and bad decisions. American billionaires set aside their fortunes to feed the poor of the world, but graft and greed on the local level compromise their good intentions. Sin is what causes malnutrition and starvation. God has many agents in this world who supply daily bread to people in wonderful ways. But Satan has agents, too, who work against God’s desire to provide daily bread without our asking even to the wicked. People all over the world plead, What’s there to eat? and too many times the answer is nothing or not nearly enough.

2. Jesus knew exactly how this episode was going to turn out. There was a teachable moment here. The disciples had just returned from a widely successful missionary trip. They were flying high. Jesus needed to remind them they would have no success at all without him. **You give them something to eat,** Jesus said, and they couldn’t. Their ideas flopped. It’s as though Jesus was ready to say, OK. Boys. Watch this.

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. There wasn’t going to be a mob here. No first come, first served. No trampling on others. Jesus would provide the bread on this day in an orderly way. **Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks.** Jesus made it clear that this daily bread came from God. He did the same thing when he broke bread with the two Emmaus disciples—remember Easter evening? Jesus did exactly the same thing. **Then he broke the loaves and divided the two fish among them all.** There was nothing spectacular here, nothing anybody would have noticed. Just like when he turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. No thunder crashes or lighting flashes. He just broke the loaves and tore pieces from the cooked fish and **gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.** Guess

what? Well, you don't have to guess; you already know. **They all ate and were satisfied.** Actually, there was more than enough for all the 5,000 men and for any women and children who were. **The disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.** When the crowds called, What's there to eat? the disciples could offer nothing. Jesus offered everything they needed and more besides.

My father would say at this point: "So what shall we learn therefrom?" Well, when Jesus provides daily bread, he does it in an orderly way. Jesus doesn't respond to the greedy or the gluttons or the gourmets. He is ready to provide what each one of us needs. Jesus wants us to know that every earthly thing we receive comes from God. Luther includes more than food when he defines daily bread: "Daily bread includes everything that we need for our bodily welfare, such as food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, land and cattle, money and goods, a godly spouse, godly children, godly workers, godly and faithful leaders, good government, good weather, peace and order, health, a good name, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." Jesus gives us these things in a natural way; there are no pennies from heaven or pots of gold at the end of the rainbow. God makes the sun shine and the rain fall and the seeds grow and the crop ripen and the yeast rise and the oven hot and the butter melt. We hardly notice. I guess sometimes—probably too many times—we take it for granted. But when we say, What's there to eat? there's always something there. And God is the one who gives it. And with just as much love, the God who gives us daily bread also gives the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And just as with our daily bread, he does it through Jesus.

It's a challenge to apply this miracle to people like us. I've been hungry in my life, but I've never been starving. In America you and I have learned to live on the kind of bread baskets that billions of people in our world can only dream about. There is a reason why thousands try to cross our borders. Perhaps it's good for us to think about those 12 baskets that were left over, the "more than enough" that Jesus so often provides. In the Second Reading for today, St. Paul was encouraging the wealthy congregation in Corinth to participate in an offering for the starving saints in Jerusalem. He wrote, **Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.** We look to God and say, What's there to eat? And God provides daily bread, even without our asking. When others look to us with the same question, What's there to eat? Well, it's something for us all to think about. Amen.