

## **REJOICING IN A SEASON OF REPENTANCE**

Hear the Word of God for this *Laetare* Sunday, as the Lord's call to *Rejoice!* enters the Church's calendar on the Sunday halfway between Ash Wednesday and the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord:

*Therefore they gathered together, and filled twelve baskets (with) pieces from the five loaves of the barley which were left over by the ones having consumed.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

For centuries, in the Sundays of Lent, the fourth Sunday has been one in which to celebrate with rejoicing. This is a, "little Easter," in which we can truly sing out with joy at that which Jesus did for us in becoming the first-fruits of the resurrection of the blessed dead. So, every year, this Sunday serves to give us God's reasons for rejoicing in a season of repentance.

Our Gospel reading for the day declares to us imagery which provides to us divine reasons for rejoicing. That is, if we are willing to hear and understand the Word in terms of the Scriptures written centuries before our Lord fed and taught the multitudes. Hear again the words which really tie together Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 men, plus women and children (maybe 25,000 - 30,000 people in all), with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead:

*So, when they were satisfied, [Jesus] says to the disciples of Him, "All of you gather the left-over pieces, than not any may have been destroyed."*

*Therefore they gathered together, and filled twelve baskets (with) pieces from the five loaves of the barley which were left over by the ones having consumed.<sup>2</sup>*

Wow, those lines do really declare the tie between the left-over barley bread and Jesus' resurrection, don't they?

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:13.

<sup>2</sup> John 6:12-13.

Well... they do, if you remember what the Scriptures teach about the ancient celebrations of the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and the Passover. In them, you will have heard at some point, whether you remember it or not today, instructions to the faithful about grain offerings for those feasts. That which was to be harvested for what is called a “wave offering” was from the firstfruits of the grain. That means that one gave it over to God, in trust that He would give more from the fields than just the initial harvest.

The only grain that would have ripened in time for bread making for those feasts that was grown in Israel at that time in history is barley. It has been plainly stated, in several reliable sources, that barley was the grain used for that offering during the time of Herod’s Temple, the time of Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes.<sup>3</sup> In addition, barley bread was then considered a basic staple food for the poor in the land of Israel.

Well, OK, that explains why, when Jesus asked where they were to buy food for so many people, Andrew offered up this response:

*Here is (a) young lad who has five loaves (of) barley and two relish fish; but these things, what are they for this many (people)?<sup>4</sup>*

So, we hear of the food of the poor in the boy’s lunch; five flat-bread barley loaves and two little pickled fish. We have heard, some of us for decades on this particular Sunday each year, that Jesus took that barley bread and the fish. Then, through words and actions which are reflected here twice each Sunday, each Wednesday morning and every Christian Feast day we celebrate, Jesus distributed it to the multitudes through His disciples. At the end, plenty was left over. Those celebrations of the Church today find a good foreshadowing when we hear words like these:

*Jesus then took the loaves, and giving thanks, He gave to the reclining ones. Likewise (He did) also from the little fish, whatsoever they desired.<sup>5</sup>*

But, earlier you were asked to reflect on the tie between the leftover barley bread and Jesus’ resurrection. You were called to discover God’s reasons for rejoicing in

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<sup>3</sup> Braaten, Jason M. *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, v. 78, Number 1-2, “Barley, Flesh, and Life: The Bread of Life Discourse and the Lord’s Supper,” *Concordia Theological Seminary: Fort Wayne*, January/April 2014, 66. Cf. Leviticus 23:9-14 and Deuteronomy 16:9-10.

<sup>4</sup> *John* 16:9.

<sup>5</sup> *John* 6:11.

this season of repentance. You were told that these words of our theme text specifically tie together Jesus' feeding of the thousands with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead:

*Therefore they gathered together, and filled twelve baskets (with) pieces from the five loaves of the barley which were left over by the ones having consumed.<sup>6</sup>*

Well, you have recently heard that barley loaves were used for wave offerings at the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover. What you may remember is that the wave offering of barley bread took place each year in the Temple on the third day of the Feasts. Think a moment about the ancient, divinely inspired order of offerings for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread:

1. The lambs for the Feast were slaughtered on the Passover.
2. The next day, at evening, the firstfruits of the grain were harvested.
3. The next morning, the wave-offering of the barley loaves was offered.

To put all this offering work in terms of the days of the week we now use:

1. The Passover lambs were killed on Thursday eve through Friday eve;
2. The grain was harvested from Friday eve through Saturday eve;
3. The barley loaves were waved in offering Sunday morning.

Is the tie between the barley loaves of Jesus' feeding of the multitudes and the wave offering of the third day of the Feasts becoming clearer? If not, hang on...

To state clearly the tie that you have likely come to, but that there be no doubt: Jesus was raised from the dead on the same day that the Jewish priests were presenting the wave-offerings of barley bread before the Lord in Herod's Temple. Our Lord was resurrected on the day of God's people offering the firstfruits. Perhaps now the statement of the Apostle Paul elsewhere in scripture has leaped into your mind:

*for now, Christ has been raised from (the) deads, Firstfruit of the ones having fallen asleep.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> John 6:13.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20.

We have just heard again the biblical revelation that Jesus, the firstfruit of the dead, was foreshadowed in the offering of the barley loaves, that which came from the firstfruits of the annual harvest. Once again, Jesus' revealed method of scripture interpreting scripture gives the faithful an image of Himself in the regular repetition of the Old Covenant offerings! This He still gives in our age, on this Sunday, every year. There is cause for rejoicing on this day of bright rose.

Yet, there is more of the resurrection to come in the parallels to be found in the multiplication of the barley loaves and fish and the resurrection of our Lord! Some of you may have already thought past the connection just revealed. You are free to keep in mind that which you have already heard in the context of the barley loaves offered at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These following words are again a key to unlocking the mystery of Jesus' resurrection which is given in His multiplication of the barley loaves:

*Therefore they gathered together, and filled twelve baskets (with) pieces from the five loaves of the barley which were left over by the ones having consumed.<sup>8</sup>*

The text indicates that the fives barley loaves and two small fish were divinely multiplied by Jesus – and distributed through the disciples – as parallel accounts inform us. There was so much left over from this meal from the food which came from the produce harvested after the firstfruits offering that 12 basketfuls were gathered.

That shows that God gives in abundance from His faithfulness to those who merely give back to Him in trust from that which He has first given them. (No, we are not headed into a law-oriented “stewardship” lesson about you giving in faith and God giving you more than you expected!) Rather, we are headed into seeing in the abundance left over from the feast multiplied from the Lord's Hand, in response to people's needs, the abundance that He brings from the firstfruits.

First, we are going to hear of the Lord continuing to feed His people in abundance from His Table. From His institution of His Supper, God in Christ has

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<sup>8</sup> John 6:13.

multiplied His gifts of forgiveness and strengthening to life eternal for all generations of the faithful since. Here, at His Table, Jesus gives, with the products made from the fruits of the harvest – bread and wine – His very Body and Blood for us to drink.

Second, we are going to hearken back to that which was already alluded to in the proclamation of God's Word here today. That is, in remembering the Lord's abundance provided following the firstfruits harvest of barley, we, you, are free to recall the abundance God will provide from the harvest which comes following Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits of those raised from the dead. What joy is to be discovered each year until the Lord returns in the clouds! It comes in the proclamation of the leftovers from one boy's five barley loaves after tens of thousands of people were fed by God incarnate. What rejoicing is here for you in the reality that just as there was plenty left from the feeding, there is room in the resurrection of the dead for you. Your body will be raised, pure, undefiled. It will be joined with your immortal spirit, never to sin again. Then, you will feast in eternity at the Lord's unending wedding feast of grace everlasting! There again is reason for rejoicing in a season of repentance.

But, there is more; return your thoughts to our text:

*Jesus then took the loaves, and giving thanks, He gave to the reclining ones. Likewise (He did) also from the little fish, whatsoever they desired.*<sup>9</sup>

This day's text of rejoicing is tied to the temptation of our Lord. Those who were here on the first Sunday of Lent heard the devil say to the same Jesus Who today miraculously multiplied barley bread and relish fish for thousands of people:

*"If Son, You remain, of the God, You must say that these stones loaves may become."*

*But [Jesus] answering, said, "It has been written, 'Not by loaf alone lives the man, but by all sayings coming out through the mouth of God.'"<sup>10</sup>*

Today, in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, we hear of Jesus displaying that He is the Son of God. He Who refused the devil's temptation to meet His own hunger's desires has compassion on His followers. Without the devil testing Him, we

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<sup>9</sup> John 6:11.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 4:3b-4, cf. Deuteronomy 8:3.

hear today that Jesus provides bread in the wilderness. He gives a new manna. He offers to sinners a gift from heaven which was foreshadowed by the old manna given by Him in the Exodus. (Oh how much we find tied together as we follow God week-to-week in His Word, assembled by Him into one before His Table)!

Jesus, of His own will, provides daily bread for His people. He feeds them from His Hand, and distributes His gifts through His called men. They receive. He does not give on account of their goodness, but out of His.

This is, as has been alluded to earlier, a foreshadowing of that greater feeding which is among us now. From this text, God prepares us for the declaration that Jesus wills to give another multiplication, now of bread and wine. From His wilderness feeding, we are moved in spirit to Jesus' Table meal. Here, He offers to His followers the gifts He gives from His wedding feast. That is another reason for joy in this season of repentance.

Today, that joy is lived out in a special way in this congregation. Here, one man and one woman will be joined into one flesh by the Word of God, in holy matrimony. Ken and Pauline will stand before the Table of the Lord. They will be called to rejoice in His gift of sacrificial love. They will pledge their troth – their faithfulness. In response to God's Word, they have desired to be united before the place where God multiplies His blessings in this House of the Faith. In the visible union of man and woman, we are free to behold the communion, the together union, of God and His people at His eternal wedding feast. Here, before the gifts of bread and wine, God comes and unites two into one, for this life.

Even so, also here before gifts of bread and wine, God comes and unites His followers into one Body. He continues to feed them, you, from one Table. In the giving of His gifts, shown first in the miracles in the wilderness, Jesus continues to feed and strengthen His own chosen people to follow Him. That, dear hearers of the Word, is a reason for rejoicing in the season of repentance.

From that Word we learn more of Him of Whom for this stands written:

*Jesus, then knowing that they were about to come and seize Him in order that they might have made Him king, departed again into the mountain alone.<sup>11</sup>*

Then, Jesus walked away from being made King by force. He knew the Father's will. That is, by force of arms, by the might of the State, Jesus would be enthroned. He would be, not a bread-King, a simple food-for-this-life King, but the King of kings who would inaugurate His reign from the cross. From that throne would flow forth the fruits of His death – salvation; and then, on the third day, the day of firstfruits, justification – the declaration that we sinners are right with the Father.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Lent IV, *Laetare* (Historic One-year series)  
Psalm 132: 8-18; Isaiah 49:8-13; Galatians 4:21-31; John 6:1-15  
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*Pastor Michael H. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>11</sup> *John* 6:15.