

**St. Mark 8:1-9, "Nourished by Christ"**  
**The Seventh Sunday after Trinity, Holy Cross Anglican Church**  
**August 7, 2011**

One of the most remarkable qualities of Jesus that you find displayed in the Gospels is that He was so compassionate. It would seem that He could not behold any form of distress without being moved with pity and compassion; whether it was the cry of a blind man, the sight of a bereaved widow, Martha and Mary at the grave, or a multitude of people who were hungry – Jesus could not witness such things without being deeply affected. Hear again what Jesus said in our Gospel: "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar." Jesus had within Himself that intimate feeling for all our wants and desires, with a tenderness like that of a mother for a child. It is just as Hebrews 4:15 relates, "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Psalm 103:13-14 says: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

Of course, after acknowledging the desperate hunger of his disciples, Jesus proceeds to perform a great miracle by feeding some four thousand of those who had been following Him throughout the countryside. On this occasion Jesus multiplies seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, and they picked up a remaining seven large baskets of fragments. That is quite a miracle indeed.

But this is not the only time in Scripture that Jesus performed a miracle like this. You remember that on another occasion Jesus fed five thousand disciples with five loaves of bread and two fish, with twelve baskets of fragments left over. And it is interesting to note that today, the Seventh Sunday after Trinity is one of *three* times this miracle of a miraculous feeding of a multitude is found in our Eucharistic lectionary (the other two

being the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, and the Sunday before Advent). And we must ask ourselves why this *particular* miracle, performed on two different occasions, is specified for our Gospel reading three times a year? I think it is mainly for two reasons. First is this: We must constantly be reminded that Jesus cares intimately for our needs *as people*. When Jesus mentioned the hunger of the disciples, one of them asked, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” The Lord is good at giving His children food in the wilderness; whether it was manna and quail for the Children of Israel, the ravens that fed Elijah, wild honey and locusts for John the Baptist, and in our Gospel this morning, all the bread and fish you can eat (and then some). Constantly in the Gospels, Jesus is meeting the most vital physical needs of those who are coming to Him and leaving everything for His sake. So often, Jesus is found healing the sick and the diseased, and sometimes even the dead, who are brought to Him. But not only did He prove this by example, Jesus specifically *taught* that our most basic physical needs would be provided if we would but seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6). It is a concept He both teaches and shows by His example.

But here is the other reason this miracle is read three times a year in our Church: We must be reminded frequently that Jesus is the *only* One who can feed and provide for us *spiritually* while *we* are in the wilderness. And in our case, that which is provided is the *spiritual food* of the most precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is true that the Lord is concerned and provides for us physically, but He also does this spiritually, and we know that *both* of these, especially the latter, are crucial to our wholeness in Jesus Christ. We know that some followed Christ just for the gifts which he provided them – these are those who loved His gifts more than they loved Christ Himself. But Jesus gives us the greatest gift when He gives us *Himself* at the Table. And just as physical food enters our body nourishing and strengthening us to do what we must, so it is with the spiritual food of this Holy Table. When we partake of this food we are nourished and strengthened to be both who and what Christ calls us to be.

A particular phrase in The Lord’s Prayer sums the point up nicely. In that prayer we say, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and we are reminded that our most basic necessities

come from the Father. It reminds us of our complete and utter dependence upon Him for the basic things we need for survival. But the word “bread” there stands for those things which are most necessary to our physical *and* spiritual well-being. We are not just praying for food, clothing and shelter, but those things we need for our souls – nourishment from the Word of God, the daily mercies of the Father, His help and consolation. We are, when we say the words “Give us this day our daily bread,” looking to God as the author and giver of all good things. It is a corrective to those who are under the impression that they are self-sufficient – we are most certainly not, not even for one day, not for one second of a day. It is a reminder of Psalm 40:17, which says, “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me.”

And so it is that the Lord supplies our needs and feeds us, just as he did for the disciples in our Gospel reading, albeit in a different way, and in an even better and more profound way. And it is precisely this that we must understand fully this morning. Brethren, we must once and for all come to grips with the fact that it is mainly in and through *the Church* that we are nourished while in the wilderness of this life. We like the disciples in the story are hungry and in need of nourishment. Come this Fall, we are going to have several new things going on here at Holy Cross – things that will help to nourish us spiritually. We are going to have classes for our young so that they can learn the great truths of Scripture which will carry them through their lives in closeness to the Father. We are going to have discipleship groups so that we, no matter where we are in our spiritual development, can continue to grow both in grace and in knowledge of Christ, and so that we can make our common supplications and petitions unto the Father. This all works together for our spiritual nourishment which is the most important aspect of our lives. This may be for us a sacrifice of our time and energy, but here we must understand perhaps the most important point about this story – it was only those who made the sacrifice of going with our Lord *three days* into the wilderness that were fed. Those who were so captivated with our Lord and His teaching to make that level of commitment, saw the miracle of the feeding, and indeed were fed. It is *this* feeding that Christ intends us to have through His Body, the Church. It is up to us to make the most of what the Church has to offer.

And so we pray again our most appropriate collect for the day: “Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.