

St. Thomas Aquinas – 4th of Lent
Catena Aurea (Golden Chain)
The Gospel: John 6:1-15

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is that of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw the miracles which he did on them that were diseased. Jesus therefore went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. Now the pasch, the festival day of the Jews, was near at hand. When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes, and seen that a very great multitude cometh to him, he said to Philip: Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to try him; for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him: Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, saith to him: There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many? Then Jesus said: Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. The men therefore sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves: and when he had given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down. In like manner also of the fishes, as much as they would. And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost. They gathered up therefore, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above to them that had eaten. Now those men, when they had seen what a miracle Jesus had done, said: This is of a truth the prophet, that is to come into the world. Jesus therefore, when he knew that they would come to take him by force, and make him king, fled again into the mountain himself alone.

BEDE. It follows, When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes, and seen that a very great multitude cometh to him, he said to Philip: Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? - When Jesus lifted up His eyes, this is to shew us, that Jesus was not generally with His eyes lifted up, looking about Him, but sitting calm and attentive, surrounded by His disciples.

CHRYS. Nor did He only sit with His disciples, but conversed with them familiarly, and gained possession of their minds. Then He looked, and saw a crowd advancing. But why did He ask Philip that question? Because He knew that His disciples, and he especially, needed further teaching. For this Philip it was who said afterwards, Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. [John 14, 8] And if the miracle had been performed at once, without any introduction, the greatness of it would not have been seen. The disciples were made to confess their own inability, that they might see the miracle more clearly; and this He said to prove him. [Hom. xlii.1]

AUG. One kind of temptation leads to sin, with which God never tempts anyone; and there is another kind by which faith is tried. [James 1, 13. Deut. 13, 3.] In this sense it is said that Christ proved His disciple. This is not meant to imply that He did not know what Philip would say; but is an accommodation to men's way of speaking. For as the

expression, Who searcheth the hearts of men, does not mean the searching of ignorance, but of absolute knowledge; so here, when it is said that our Lord proved Philip, we must understand that He knew him perfectly, but that He tried him, in order to confirm his faith. The Evangelist himself guards against the mistake which this imperfect mode of speaking might occasion, by adding, For He Himself knew what He would do. [de Verb. Dom. Serm. 17.]

ALCUIN. He asks him this question, not for His own information, but in order to shew His yet unformed disciple his dulness of mind, which he could not perceive of himself.

THEOPHYL. Or to shew others it. He was not ignorant of His disciple's heart Himself.

AUG. But if our Lord, according to John's account, on seeing the multitude, asked Philip, tempting him, whence they could buy food for them, it is difficult at first to see how it can be true, according to the other account, that the disciples first told our Lord, to send away the multitude; and that our Lord replied, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. [Matt. 25, 16] We must understand then it was after saying this, that our Lord saw the multitude, and said to Philip what John had related, which has been omitted by the rest. [de Con. Evang. l. ii. c. xlvi.]

CHRYS. Or they are two different occasions altogether. [Hom. xlii. s. 1.]

THEOPHYL. Thus tried by our Lord, Philip was found to be possessed with human notions, as appears from what follows, Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may take a little.

ALCUIN. Wherein he shews his dulness: for, had he perfect ideas of his Creator, he would not be thus doubting His power.

AUG. The reply, which is attributed to Philip by John, Mark puts in the mouth of all the disciples, either meaning us to understand that Philip spoke for the rest, or else putting the plural number for the singular, which is often done. [de Con. Evan. l. ii. c. xlvi.]

THEOPHYL. Andrew is in the same perplexity that Philip is; only he has rather higher notions of our Lord: There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes.

CHRYS. Probably He had some reason in his mind for this speech. He would know of Elijah's miracle, by which a hundred men were fed with twenty loaves. This was a great step; but here he stopped. He did not rise any higher. For his next words are, But what are these among so many? He thought that less could produce less in a miracle, and more more; a great mistake; inasmuch as it was as easy for Christ to feed the multitude from a few fishes as from many. He did not really want any material to work from, but only made use of created things for this purpose in order to shew that no part of the creation was severed from His wisdom. [Hom. xlii. 11.]

THEOPHYL. This passage confounds the Manicheans, who say that bread and all such things were created by an evil Deity. The Son of the good God, Jesus Christ, multiplied the loaves. Therefore they could not have been naturally evil; a good God would never have multiplied what was evil.

AUG. Andrew's suggestion about the five loaves and two fishes, is given as coming from the disciples in general, in the other Evangelists, and the plural number is used. [de Con. Evan. l. ii. c. xlvi.]

CHRYS. And let those of us, who are given to pleasure, observe the plain and abstemious eating of those great and wonderful men [Alluding to the five loaves and two fishes.]. He made the men sit down before the loaves appeared, to teach us that with Him, things that are not are as things that are; as Paul says, Who calleth those things that be not, as though they were. [Rom. 25, 17] [Hom. xlii. 11]

The passage proceeds then: And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.

ALCUIN. Sit down, i.e. lie down, as the ancient custom was, which they could do, as there was much grass in the place.

THEOPHYL. i.e. green grass. It was the time of the Passover, which was kept the first month of the spring. So the men sat down in number about five thousand. The Evangelist only counts the men, following the direction in the law. Moses numbered the people from twenty years old and upwards, making no mention of the women; to signify that the manly and juvenile character is especially honourable in God's eyes. And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed [Vulgate omits, to the disciples, and the disciples.] to them that were sat down: and likewise of the fishes as much, as they would.

CHRYS. But why when He is going to heal the impotent, to raise the dead, to calm the sea, does He not pray, but here does give thanks? To teach us to give thanks to God, whenever we sit down to eat. And He prays more in lesser matters, in order to shew that He does not pray from any motive of need. For had prayer been really necessary to supply His wants, His praying would have been in proportion to the importance of each particular work. But acting, as He does, on His own authority, it is evident, He only prays out of condescension to us. And, as a great multitude was collected, it was an opportunity of impressing on them, that His coming was in accordance with God's will. Accordingly, when a miracle was private, He did not pray; when numbers were present, He did. [Hom. xlii. 11]

HILARY. Five loaves are then set before the multitude, and broken. The broken portions pass through into the hands of those who break, that from which they are broken all the time not at all diminishing. And yet there they are, the bits taken from it, in the hands of the persons breaking [d]. There is no catching by eye or touch the miraculous operation: that is, which was not, that is seen, which is not understood. It only remains for us to believe that God can do all things. [Hilar. iii. de Trin. c. 18]

AUG. He multiplied in His hands the five loaves, just as He produces harvest out of a few grains. There was a power in the hands of Christ; and those five loaves were, as it were, seeds, not indeed committed to the earth, but multiplied by Him who made the earth. [Aug. Tr. xxiv. s. 1.]

CHRYS. Observe the difference between the servant and the lord. The Prophets received grace, as it were, by measure, and according to that measure performed their miracles: whereas Christ, working this by His own absolute power, produces a kind of

superabundant result. When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments. This was not done for needless ostentation, but to prevent men from thinking the whole a delusion; which was the reason why He made use of an existing material to work from. But why did He give the fragments to His disciples to carry away, and not to the multitude? Because the disciples were to be the teachers of the world, and therefore it was most important that the truth should be impressed upon them. Wherefore I admire not only the multitude of the loaves which were made, but the definite quantity of the fragments; neither more nor less than twelve baskets full, and corresponding to the number of the twelve Apostles. [Hom. xlii. 3.]

THEOPHYL. We learn too from this miracle, not to be pusillanimous in the greatest straits of poverty.

BEDE. When the multitude saw the miracle our Lord had done, they marvelled; as they did not know yet that He was God. Then those men, the Evangelist adds, i.e. carnal men, whose understanding was carnal, when they had perceived the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.

ALCUIN. Their faith being as yet weak, they only call our Lord a Prophet, not knowing that He was God. But the miracle had produced considerable effect upon them, as it made them call our Lord that Prophet, singling Him out from the rest. They call Him a Prophet, because some of the Prophets had worked miracles; and properly, inasmuch as our Lord calls Himself a Prophet; It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. [Luke 13, 33.]

AUG. Christ is a Prophet, and the Lord of Prophets; as He is an Angel, and the Lord of Angels. In that He came to announce something; He was an Angel; in that He foretold the future, He was a Prophet; in that He was the Word made flesh, He was Lord both of Angels and Prophets; for none can be a Prophet without the word of God. [Tr. xxiv. s. 7.]

CHRYS. Their expression, that should come into the world, shews that they expected the arrival of some great Prophet. And this is why they say, This is of a truth that Prophet: the article being put in the Greek, to shew that He was distinct from other Prophets.

AUG. But let us reflect a little here. Forasmuch as the Divine Substance is not visible to the eye, and the miracles of the divine government of the world, and ordering of the whole creation, are overlooked in consequence of their constancy; God has reserved to Himself acts, beside the established course and order of nature, to do at suitable times; in order that those who overlooked the daily course of nature, might be roused to wonder by the sight of what was different from, though not at all greater, than what they were used to. The government of the world is a greater miracle, than the satisfying the hunger of five thousand with five loaves; and yet no one wonders at this: the former excited wonder; not from any real superiority in it, but because it was uncommon. But it would be wrong to gather no more than this from Christ's miracles: for, the Lord who is on the mount [V. 15. departed into a mountain Himself alone.], and the Word of God which is on high, the same is no humble person to be lightly passed over, but we must look up to Him reverently. [Tr. xxiv. 2. 1, 2.]

ALCUIN. Mystically, the sea signifies this tumultuous world. In the fulness of time, when Christ had entered the sea of our mortality by His birth, trodden it by His death, passed over it by His resurrection [V. 1. Jesus went over the sea of Galilee.], then followed Him crowds of believers, both from the Jews and Gentiles.

BEDE. Our Lord went up to the mountain, when He ascended to heaven, which is signified by the mountain.

ALCUIN. His leaving the multitude below, and ascending the heights with His disciples, signifies, that lesser precepts are to be given to beginners, higher to the more matured. His refreshing the people shortly before the Passover signifies our refreshment by the bread of the divine word; and the body and blood, i.e. our spiritual passover, by which we pass over from vice to virtue. And the Lord's eyes are spiritual gifts, which he mercifully bestows on His Elect. He turns His eyes upon them, i.e. has compassionate respect unto them.

AUG. The five barley loaves signify the old law; either because the law was given to men not as yet spiritual, but carnal, i.e. under the dominion of the five senses, (the multitude itself consisted of five thousand:) or because the Law itself was given by Moses in five books. And the loaves being of barley is also an allusion to the Law, which concealed the soul's vital nourishment, under carnal ceremonies. For in barley the corn itself is buried under the most tenacious husk. Or, it alludes to the people who were not yet freed from the husk of carnal appetite, which cling to their heart. [lib. lxxxiii. Quaest. q. 61. in princ.]

BEDE. Barley is the food of cattle and slaves: and the old law was given to slaves and cattle, i.e. to carnal men. [Hom. in Luc. c. vi.]

AUG. The two fishes again, that gave the pleasant taste to the bread, seem to signify the two authorities by which the people were governed, the Royal, viz. and the Priestly; both of which prefigure our Lord, who sustained both characters. [lib. lxxxiv, Quaest. qu. 61.]

BEDE. Or, by the two fishes are meant the saying or writings of the Prophets, and the Psalmist. And whereas the number five refers to the five senses, a thousand stands for perfection. But those who strive to obtain the perfect government of their five senses, are called men, in consequence of their superior powers: they have no womanly weaknesses; but by a sober and chaste life, earn the sweet refreshment of heavenly wisdom.

AUG. The boy who had these is perhaps the Jewish people, who, as it were, carried the loaves and fishes after a servile fashion, and did not eat them. That which they carried, while shut up, was only a burden to them; when opened became their food. [Tr. xxiv. 5.]

BEDE. And well is it said, But what are these among so many? The Law was of little avail, till He took it into His hand, i.e. fulfilled it, and gave it a spiritual meaning. The Law made nothing perfect. [Heb. 7, 19]

AUG. By the act of breaking He multiplied the five loaves. The five books of Moses, when expounded by breaking, i.e. unfolding them, made many books. [Tr. xxiv. 5.]

AUG. Our Lord by breaking, as it were, what was hard in the Law, and opening what was shut, that time when He opened the Scriptures to the disciples after the resurrection, brought the Law out in its full meaning. [lib. lxxxiii. Quaest. qu. 61.]

AUG. Our Lord's question proved the ignorance of His disciples, i.e. the people's ignorance of the Law. They lay on the grass, i.e. were carnally minded, rested in carnal things, for all flesh is grass. [Isa. 40, 6.] Men are filled with the loaves, when what they hear with the ear, they fulfill in practice. [Tr. xxiv. 5.]

AUG. And what are the fragments, but the parts which the people could not eat? An intimation, that those deeper truths, which the multitude cannot take in, should be entrusted to those who are capable of receiving them, and afterwards teaching them to others; as were the Apostles. For which reason twelve baskets were filled with them. [Tr. xxiv. 6.]

ALCUIN. Baskets are used for servile work. The baskets here are the Apostles and their followers, who, though despised in this present life, are within filled with the riches of spiritual sacraments. The Apostles too are represented as baskets, because, that through them, the doctrine of the Trinity was to be preached in the four parts of the world. His not making new loaves, but multiplying what there were, means that He did not reject the Old Testament, but only developed and explained it.

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St. Thomas Aquinas – 4th Sunday of Lent

Catena Aurea (Golden Chain)

The Gospel Parallel: Matthew 14:13-21

Which when Jesus had heard, he retired from thence by boat, into a desert place apart, and the multitudes having heard of it, followed him on foot out of the cities. And he coming forth saw a great multitude, and had compassion on them, and healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying: This is a desert place, and the hour is now past: send away the multitudes, that going into the towns, they may buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said to them, They have no need to go: give you them to eat. They answered him: We have not here, but five loaves, and two fishes. He said to them: Bring them hither to me. And when he had commanded the multitudes to sit down upon the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up what remained, twelve full baskets of fragments. And the number of them that did eat, was five thousand men, besides women and children.

Gloss., ap. Anselm: The Saviour having heard the death of the Baptist, retired into the desert; as it follows, “*Which when Jesus had heard, he retired from thence by boat, into a desert place apart.*”

Aug., De Cons. Ev., ii, 45: This the Evangelist relates to have been done immediately after the passion of John, therefore after this were those things done that were spoken of above, and moved Herod to say, "This is John." For we must suppose those things to have been after his death which report carried to Herod, and which moved him to doubt who he could be concerning whom he heard such things; for himself had put John to death.

Jerome: He did not retire into the desert through fear of death, as some suppose, but in mercy to His enemies, that they might not add murder to murder; putting off His death till the day of His passion; on which day the lamb is to be slain as the sacrament, and the posts of them that believe to be sprinkled with the blood.

Or, He retired to leave us an example to shun that rashness which leads men to surrender themselves voluntarily, because not all persevere with like constancy under torture with the why they offered themselves to it. For this reason He says in another place, "When they shall persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." Whence the Evangelist says not 'fled,' but elegantly, "departed thence," (or, 'withdrew,') shewing that He shunned rather than feared persecution.

Or for another reason He might have withdrawn into a desert place on hearing of John's death, namely, to prove the faith of the believers.

Chrys.: Or; He did this because He desired to prolong the economy of His humanity, the time not being yet come for openly manifesting His deity; wherefore also He charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ. But after His resurrection He would have this made manifest.

Therefore although He knew of Himself what was done, yet before it was told Him He withdrew not, that He might shew the verity of His incarnation in all things; for He would that this should be assured not by sight only, but by His actions. And when He withdrew, He did not go into the city, but into the desert by ship that none might follow Him. Yet do not the multitudes leave Him even for this, but still follow after Him, not deterred by what had been done concerning John.

Whence it follows, "*and the multitudes having heard of it, followed him on foot out of the cities.*"

Jerome: They followed on foot, not riding, or in carriages, but with the toil of their own legs, to shew the ardour of their mind.

Chrys.: And they immediately reap the reward of this; for it follows, "*And he coming forth saw a great multitude, and had compassion on them, and healed their sick.*" For though great was the affection of those who had left their cities, and sought Him carefully, yet the things that were done by Him surpassed the reward of any zeal.

Therefore he assigns compassion as the cause of this healing. And it is great compassion to heal all, and not to require faith.

Hilary: Mystically; The Word of God, on the close of the Law, entered the ship, that is, the Church; and departed into the desert, that is, leaving to walk with Israel, He passes into breasts void of Divine knowledge. The multitude learning this, follows the Lord out of the city into the desert, going, that is, from the Synagogue to the Church. The Lord sees them,

and has compassion upon them, and heals all sickness and infirmity, that is, He cleanses their obstructed minds, and unbelieving hearts for the understanding of the new preaching.

Jerome: It is to be observed moreover, that when the Lord came into the desert, great crowds followed Him; for before He went into the wilderness of the Gentiles, He was worshipped by only one people. They leave their cities, that is, their former conversation, and various dogmas. That Jesus went out, shews that the multitudes had the will to go, but not the strength to attain, therefore the Saviour departs out of His place and goes to meet them.

Chrys.: It is a proof of the faith of these multitudes that they endured hunger in waiting for the Lord even till evening; to which purpose it follows, "*And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying: This is a desert place, and the hour is now past.*"

The Lord purposing to feed them waits to be asked, as always not stepping forward first to do miracles, but when called upon. None out of the crowd approached Him, both because they stood in great awe of Him, and because in their zeal of love they did not feel their hunger. But even the disciples do not come and say, Give them to eat; for the disciples were as yet in an imperfect condition; but they say, "*This is a desert place.*" So that what was proverbial among the Jews to express a miracle, as it is said, "Can he spread a table in the wilderness?" [Ps 78:19] this also He shews among his other works.

For this cause also He leads them out into the desert, that the miracle might be clear of all suspicion, and that none might suppose that any thing was supplied towards the feast from any neighbouring town. But though the place be desert, yet is He there who feeds the world; and though the hour is, as they say, past, yet He who now commanded was not subjected to hours. And though the Lord had gone before His disciples in healing many sick, yet they were so imperfect that they could not judge what He would do concerning food for them, wherefore they add, "*This is a desert place, and the hour is now past: send away the multitudes, that going into the towns, they may buy themselves victuals.*" Observe the wisdom of the Master; He says not straightway to them, 'I will give them to eat;' for they would not easily have received this, but, "*Jesus said to them, They have no need to go: give you them to eat.*"

Jerome: Wherein He calls the Apostles to breaking of bread, that the greatness of the miracle might be more evident by their testimony that they had none.

Aug., De Cons. Ev., ii, 46: It may perplex some how, if the Lord, according to the relation of John, asked Philip whence bread was to be found for them, that can be true which Matthew here relates, that the disciples first prayed the Lord to send the multitudes away, that they might buy food from the nearest towns. Suppose then that after these words the Lord looked upon the multitude and said what John relates, but Matthew and the others have omitted. And by such cases as this none ought to be perplexed, when one of the Evangelists relates what the rest have omitted.

Chrys.: Yet not even by these words were the disciples set right, but speak yet to Him as to man; "*They answered him: We have not here, but five loaves, and two fishes.*" From this we learn the philosophy of the disciples, how far they despised food; they were twelve

in number, yet they had but five loaves and two fishes; for things of the body were contemned by them, they were altogether possessed by spiritual things. But because the disciples were yet attracted to earth, the Lord begins to introduce the things that were of Himself; *“He said to them: Bring them hither to me.”*

Wherefore does He not create out of nothing the bread to feed the multitude with? That He might put to silence the mouth of Marcion and Manichaeus, who take away from God His creatures, [margin note: i.e. deny that God created the visible world] and by His deeds might teach that all things that are seen are His works and creation, and that it is He that has given us the fruits of the earth, who said in the beginning, “Let the earth bring forth the green herb;” [Gen 1:11] for this is no less a deed than that. For of five loaves to make so many loaves, and fishes in like manner, is no less a thing than to bring fruits from the earth, reptiles and other living things from the waters; which shewed Him to be Lord both of land and sea.

By the example of the disciples also we ought to be taught, that though we should have but little, we ought to give that to such as have need. For they when bid to bring their five loaves say not, Whence shall we satisfy our own hunger? but immediately obey; *“And when he had commanded the multitudes to sit down upon the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake.”*

Why did He look to heaven and bless? For it should be believed concerning Him that He is from the Father, and that He is equal with the Father. His equality He shews when He does all things with power. That He is from the Father He shews by referring to Him whatsoever He does, and calling upon Him on all occasions.

To prove these two things therefore, He works His miracles at times with power, at other times with prayer. It should be considered also that in lesser things He looks to heaven, but in greater He does all with power. When He forgave sins, raised the dead, stilled the sea, opened the secrets of the heart, opened the eyes of him that was born blind, which were works only of God, He is not seen to pray; but when He multiplies the loaves, a work less than any of these, He looks up to heaven, that you may learn that even in little things He has no power but from His Father.

And at the same time He teaches us not to touch our food, until we have returned thanks to Him who gives it us. For this reason also He looks up to heaven, because His disciples had examples of many other miracles, but none of this.

Jerome: While the Lord breaks there is a sowing of food; for had the loaves been whole and not broken into fragments, and thus divided into a manifold harvest, they could not have fed so great a multitude. The multitude receives the food from the Lord through the Apostles; as it follows, *“and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes.”*

Chrys.: In doing which He not only honoured them, but would that upon this miracle they should not be unbelieving, nor forget it when it was past, seeing their own hands had borne witness to it. Therefore also He suffers the multitudes first to feel the sense of hunger, and His disciples to come to Him, and to ask Him, and He took the loaves at their

hands, that they might have many testimonies of that which was done, and many things to remind them of the miracle.

From this that He gave them, nothing more than bread and fish, and that He set this equally before all, He taught them moderation, frugality, and that charity by which they should have all things in common. This He also taught them in the place, in making them sit down upon the grass; for He sought not to feed the body only, but to instruct the mind.

But the bread and fish multiplied in the disciples' hands; whence it follows, "*And they did all eat, and were filled.*"

But the miracle ended not here; for He caused to abound not only whole loaves, but fragments also; to shew that the first loaves were not so much as what was left, and that they who were not present might learn what had been done, and that none might think that what had been done was a phantasy; "*And they took up what remained, twelve full baskets of fragments.*"

Jerome: Each of the Apostles fills his basket of the fragments left by his Saviour, that these fragments might witness that they were true loaves that were multiplied.

Chrys.: For this reason also He caused twelve baskets to remain over and above, that Judas might bear his basket. He took up the fragments, and gave them to the disciples and not to the multitudes, who were yet more imperfectly trained than the disciples.

Jerome: To the number of loaves, five, the number of the men that ate is apportioned, five thousand; "*And the number of them that did eat, was five thousand men, besides women and children.*"

Chrys.: This was to the very great credit of the people, that the women and the men stood up when these remnants still remained.

Hilary: The five loaves are not multiplied into more, but fragments succeed to fragments; the substance growing whether upon the tables, or in the hands that took them up, I know not.

Raban.: When John is to describe this miracle, he first tells us that the passover is at hand; Matthew and Mark place it immediately after the execution of John. Hence we may gather, that he was beheaded when the paschal festival was near at hand, and that at the passover of the following year, the mystery of the Lord's passion was accomplished.

Jerome: But all these things are full of mysteries; the Lord does these things not in the morning, nor at noon, but in the evening, when the Sun of righteousness was set.

Remig.: By the evening the Lord's death is denoted; and after He, the true Sun, was set on the altar of the cross, He filled the hungry. Or by evening is denoted the last age of this world, in which the Son of God came and refreshed the multitudes of those that believed on Him.

Raban.: When the disciples ask the Lord to send away the multitudes that they might buy food in the towns, it signifies the pride of the Jews towards the multitudes of the Gentiles, whom they judged rather fit to seek for themselves food in the assemblies of the Pharisees than to use the pasture of the Divine books.

Hilary: But the Lord answered, “They have no need to go,” shewing that those whom He heals have no need of the food of mercenary doctrine, and have no necessity to return to Judaea to buy food; and He commands the Apostles that they give them food. Did He not know then that there was nothing to give them?

But there was a complete series of types to be set forth; for as yet it was not given the Apostles to make and minister the heavenly bread, the flood of eternal life; and their answer thus belongs to the chain of spiritual interpretation; they were as yet confined to the five loaves, that is, the five books of the Law, and the two fishes, that is, the preaching of the Prophets and of John.

Raban.: Or, by the two fishes we may understand the Prophets, and the Psalms, for the whole of the Old Testament was comprehended in these three, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

Hilary: These therefore the Apostles first set forth, because they were yet in these things; and from these things the preaching of the Gospel grows to its more abundant strength and virtue. Then the people is commanded to sit down upon the grass, as no longer lying upon the ground, but resting upon the Law, each one reposing upon the fruit of his own works as upon the grass of the earth.

Jerome: Or, they are bid to lie down on the grass, and that, according to another Evangelist, by fifties and by hundreds, that after they have trampled upon their flesh, and have subjugated the pleasures of the world as dried grass under them, then by the presence [ed. note: Vallarsi reads paenitentiam, Jerome has borrowed the interpretation from Origen who refers to the year of jubilee; and the Glossa ordinaria on this verse is, “The rest of the Jubilee is here contained under the mystery of the number fifty; for fifty twice taken makes a hundred; because we must first rest from evil actions, that the soul may afterwards more fully repose in meditation.”] of the number fifty, they ascend to the eminent perfection of a hundred.

He looks up to heaven to teach us that our eyes are to be directed thither. The Law with the Prophets is broken, and in the midst of them are brought forward mysteries, that whereas they partook not of it whole, when broken into pieces it may be food for the multitude of the Gentiles.

Hilary: Then the loaves are given to the Apostles, because through them the gifts of divine grace were to be rendered. And the number of them that did eat is found to be the same as that of those who should believe; for we find in the book of Acts that out of the vast number of the people of Israel, five thousand men believed.

Jerome: There partook five thousand who had reached maturity; for women and children, the weaker sex, and the tender age, were unworthy of number; thus in the book of Numbers, slaves, women, children, and an undistinguished crowd, are passed over unnumbered.

Raban.: The multitude being hungry, He creates no new viands, but having taken what the disciples had, He gave thanks. In like manner when He came in the flesh, He preached

no other things than what had been foretold, but shewed that the writings of the Law and the Prophets were big with mysteries.

That which the multitude leave is taken up by the disciples, because the more secret mysteries which cannot be comprehended by the uninstructed, are not to be treated with neglect, but are to be diligently sought out by the twelve Apostles (who are represented by the twelve baskets) and their successors. For by baskets servile offices are performed, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong. The five thousand for the five senses of the body are they who in a secular condition know how to use rightly things without.

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The Passing of the Law – 4th of Lent St. Hilary, Bishop and Doctor

The times of the Law being now at an end, and buried together with John, his disciples then came: from the Law to the Gospel, and told the Lord what had happened. And so the Law being ended, the Word of God, embarking on a ship, enters the Church, and passes over into a desert place; abandoning His association with Israel to enter into hearts yet empty of the knowledge of God. The people hearing this followed the Lord out of the city into the desert; that is, withdrawing from the synagogue to the Church. And He seeing the multitude had compassion on it, and healed all their sick and infirm; that is, cleansed the bodies and souls beset with the lassitude of unbelief, that they might understand the new Gospel.

And when the Disciples urged Him to send away the people, to buy food in the neighbouring villages, He replied to them, that: *they have no need to go*; showing, that those He healed were not in want of the food of the doctrine of the Law, and had no need to return to Judea to buy it. So He bids His Apostles feed them. Did He not know they had nothing to give? Did He not know, He who saw the secrets of men's hearts, how much the Apostles had for themselves? But all this had a symbolic purpose, now to be unfolded. For it had not yet been given to the Apostles to prepare, and to minister, the heavenly bread, the food of eternal life. Their reply opened the way to an ordered exposition of spiritual teaching. For they answered that they had only five loaves and two fishes: for till now they had been nourished from the five loaves; that is, from the five books of the Law, and by the two fishes, that is, by the preaching of the prophets and of John. For in the works of the Law, as from bread, there was life; and the preaching of John and the prophets refreshed as with water the true hope of human life. It was these therefore, since they were nurtured in them, that the Apostles at first carried with them; from them the preaching of the Gospel is shown to have been foretold, and rising from these sources, its own perfection grows in ever increasing richness.

And so, taking the loaves and fishes, the Lord looked up to heaven, then blessed and broke them, giving thanks to the Father that, after the Law and the Prophets, He is Himself become the Evangelical Bread. And when He had commanded the people to sit down on the grass, not to lie prone on the earth, but to sit upheld by the Law, each one spread his own good works, like the grass of the earth, under him. The bread is also given to the Apostles, because it is through them the gifts of the divine grace are to be given. Then the people ate of the five loaves and the two fishes, after all who had sat down were satisfied, there remained over enough to fill twelve baskets: that is, the hunger of the multitude is satisfied by the word of God coming to them from the teaching of the Law and the Prophets; and the abundance of the divine goodness, kept it in reserve for the people of the Gentiles, has overflowed from the source of eternal Food unto the filling of the Twelve Apostles.

And the number of those who ate is, we find, the same as that of those who were to believe. For, as we learn from the Book of the Acts, out of the numbers of the people of Israel five thousand believed (Acts iv. 4). For the miracle of these things extends even to the measure of the reason that underlies them. The bread together with the fishes broken for the feeding of the people increased to the need of the number of people who believed, and to the number of Apostles chosen to be filled with heavenly graces: so that the quantity conformed to the number, and the number to the quantity, and so that the reason contained within them might, under the guidance of the divine power, be linked with the outward circumstances of the effect that was to follow.

The wonder of this deed surpasses human understanding. And while often things are done which the mind can grasp but words cannot explain, in these things even the acuteness of the mind to perceive is at a loss: astonished at the very thought of the complexity of this unseen action. For taking in His hands the five loaves, the Lord looks up to heaven, and acknowledges His glory from Whom He Himself was: not that He needed to look upon the Father with the eyes of His Body, but that those who stood about him might know from Whom He had received such power. He then gives the bread to His Disciples. The five loaves are not multiplied into many loaves; but to the portions broken off succeed other portions, which pass unnoticed from the hands breaking them. The substance progressively increases, whether at the place that served for tables, or in the hands of those taking it, or in the mouth of those who ate it, I know not.

Wonder not that the fountains run, that *there are grapes in the vines*, and that wine comes forth from the grapes; and that all the resources this world come to us in a certain yearly and unwearied motion; for this so great yield of loaves proclaims the Maker of all this, by Whom the quantity of the substance He has touched is so increased. Under this visible work we have an invisible making; and the Lord of heaven's mysteries works the miracle of this mystery before us. And the Power of Him Who makes surpasses all nature; and the nature of that power far exceeds our understanding of what He does; and all that remains is the Mystery of His power, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen.

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From a Commentary of Origen on St. Matthew's Gospel – 4th of Lent

INTRODUCTION TO THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND.

And when even was come His disciples came to Him," that is, at the consummation of the age in regard to which we may fitly say what is found in the Epistle of John, "It is the last hour." They, not yet understanding what the Word was about to do, say to Him, "The place is desert," seeing the desert condition of the masses in respect of God and the Law and the Word; but they say to Him, "The time is past," as if the fitting season of the law and prophets had passed. Perhaps they spoke this saying, in reference to the word of Jesus, that because of the beheading of John both the law and the prophets who were until John had ceased. "The time is past," therefore they say, and no food is at hand, because the season of it is no longer present, that those who have followed Thee in the desert may serve the law and the prophets. And, further, the disciples say, "Send them away," that each one may buy food, if he cannot from the cities, at least from the villages,--places more ignoble. Such things the disciples said, because, after the letter of the law had been abrogated and prophecies had ceased, they despaired of unexpected and new food being found for the multitudes. But see what Jesus answers to the disciples though He does not cry out and plainly say it: "You suppose that, if the great multitude go away from Me in need of food, they will find it in villages rather than with Me, and among bodies of men, not of citizens but of villagers, rather than by abiding with Me. But I declare unto you, that in regard to that of which you suppose they are in need they are not in need, for they have no need to go away; but in regard to that of which you think they have no need--that is, of Me--as if I could not feed them, of this contrary to your expectation they have need. Since, then, I have trained you, and made you fit to give rational food to them who are in need of it, give ye to the crowds who have followed Me to eat; for ye have the power, which ye have received from Me, of giving the multitudes to eat; and if ye had attended to this, ye would have understood that I am far more able to feed them, and ye would not have said, 'Send the multitudes away that they may go and buy food for themselves.'" "

2. EXPOSITION OF THE DETAILS OF THE MIRACLE.

Jesus, then, because of the power which He gave to the disciples, even the power of nourishing others, said, Give ye them to eat. But (not denying that they can give loaves, but thinking that there were much too few and not sufficient to feed those who followed Jesus, and not considering that when Jesus takes each loaf--the Word--He extends it as far as He wills, and makes it suffice for all whomsoever He desires to nourish), the disciples say, We have here but five loaves and two fishes. Perhaps by the five loaves they meant to make a veiled reference to the sensible words of the Scriptures, corresponding in number on this account to the five senses, but by the two fishes either to the word expressed and

the word conceived, which are a relish, so to speak, to the sensible things contained in the Scriptures; or, perhaps, to the word which had come to them about the Father and the Son. Wherefore also after His resurrection He ate of a broiled fish, having taken a part from the disciples, and having received that theology about the Father which they were in part able to declare to Him. Such is the contribution we have been able to give to the exposition of the word about the five loaves and the two fishes; and probably those, who are better able than we to gather together the five loaves and the two fishes among themselves, would be able to give a fuller and better interpretation of their meaning. It must be observed, however, that while in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the disciples say that they have the five loaves and the two fishes, without indicating whether they were wheaten or of barley, John alone says, that the loaves were barley loaves. Wherefore, perhaps, in the Gospel of John the disciples do not acknowledge that the loaves are with them, but say in John, "There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes." And so long as these five loaves and two fishes were not carried by the disciples of Jesus, they did not increase or multiply, nor were they able to nourish more; but, when the Saviour took them, and in the first place looked up to heaven, with the rays of His eyes, as it were, drawing down from it power which was to be mingled with the loaves and the fishes which were about to feed the five thousand; and after this blessed the five loaves and the two fishes, increasing and multiplying them by the word and the blessing; and in the third place dividing and breaking He gave to the disciples that they might set them before the multitudes, then the loaves and the fishes were sufficient, so that all ate and were satisfied, and some portions of the loaves which had been blessed they were unable to eat. For so much remained over to the multitudes, which was not according to the capacity of the multitudes but of the disciples who were able to take up that which remained over of the broken pieces, and to place it in baskets filled with that which remained over, which were in number so many as the tribes of Israel. Concerning Joseph, then, it is written in the Psalms, "His hands served in the basket," but about the disciples of Jesus that they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces twelve baskets, twelve baskets, I take it, not half-full but filled. And there are, I think, up to the present time, and will be until the consummation of the age with the disciples of Jesus, who are superior to the multitudes, the twelve baskets, filled with the broken pieces of living bread which the multitudes cannot eat. Now those who ate of the five loaves which existed before the twelve baskets that remained over, were kindred in nature to the number five; for those who ate had reached the stage of sensible things, since also they were nourished by Him who looked up to heaven and blessed and brake them, and were not boys nor women, but men. For there are, I think, even in sensible foods differences, so that some of them belong to those who "have put away childish things," and some to those who are still babes and carnal in Christ.

3. THE EXPOSITION OF DETAILS CONTINUED. THE SITTING DOWN ON THE GRASS. THE DIVISION INTO COMPANIES.

We have spoken these things because of the words, "They that did eat were five thousand men, beside children and women," which is an ambiguous expression; for either

those who ate were five thousand men, and among those who ate there was no child or woman; or the men only were five thousand, the children and the women not being reckoned. Some, then, as we have said by anticipation, have so understood the passage that neither children nor women were present, when the increase and multiplication of the five loaves and the two fishes took place. But some one might say that, while many ate and according to their desert and capacity participated in the loaves of blessing, some worthy to be numbered, corresponding to the men of twenty years old who are numbered in the Book of Numbers, were Israelitish men, but others who were not worthy of such account and numbering were children and women.

Moreover, interpret with me allegorically the children in accordance with the passage, "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ;" and the women in accordance with the saying, "I wish to present you all as a pure virgin to Christ;" and the men according to the saying, "When I am become a man I have put away childish things." Let us not pass by without exposition the words, "He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass, and He look the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. And they did all eat." For what is meant by the words, "And He commanded all the multitudes to sit down on the grass?" And what are we to understand in the passage worthy of the command of Jesus? Now, I think that He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass because of what is said in Isaiah, "All flesh is grass;" that is to say, He commanded them to put the flesh under, and to keep in subjection "the mind of the flesh," that so any one might be able to partake of the loaves which Jesus blesses. Then since there are different orders of those who need the food which Jesus supplies and all are not nourished by equal words, on this account I think that Mark has written, "And He commanded them that they should all sit down by companies upon the green grass; and they sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties;" but Luke, "And He said unto His disciples, Make them sit down in companies about fifty each." For it was necessary that those who were to find rest in the food of Jesus should either be in the order of the hundred--the sacred number--which is consecrated to God, because of the unit, (in it) or in the order of the fifty--the number which embraces the remission of sins, in accordance with the mystery of the Jubilee which took place every fifty years, and of the feast at Pentecost. And I think that the twelve baskets were in the possession of the disciples to whom it was said "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And as the throne of him who judges the tribe of Reuben might be said to be a mystery, and the throne of him who judges the tribe of Simeon, and another of him who judges the tribe of Judah, and so on with the others; so there might be a basket of the food of Reuben, and another of Simeon, and another of Levi. But it is not in accordance with our present discourse now to digress so far from the subject in hand as to collect what is said about the twelve tribes, and separately what is said about each of them, and to say what each tribe of Israel may signify.

4. THE MULTITUDES AND THE DISCIPLES CONTRASTED.

“And straightway He constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before Him unto the other side, till He should send the multitudes away.” It should be observed how often in the same passages is mentioned the word, “the multitudes,” and another word, “the disciples,” so that by observing and bringing together the passages about this matter it may be seen that the aim of the Evangelists was to represent by means of the Gospel history the differences of those who come to Jesus; of whom some are the multitudes and are not called disciples, and others are the disciples who are better than the multitudes. It is sufficient, however, for the present, for us to set forth a few sayings, so that any one who is moved by them may do the like with the whole of the Gospels. It is written then--as if the multitudes were below, but the disciples were able to come to Jesus when He went up into the mountain, where the multitudes were not able to be--as follows: “And seeing the multitudes He went up into the mountain, and when He had sat down His disciples came unto Him; and He opened His mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit,” etc. And again in another place, as the multitudes stood in need of healing, it is said, “Many multitudes followed Him and He healed them.” We do not find any healing recorded of the disciples; since if any one is already a disciple of Jesus he is whole, and being well he needs Jesus not as a physician but in respect of His other powers. Again in another place, when He was speaking to the multitudes, His mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him; this was made known to Him by some one to whom He answered, stretching forth His hand not towards the multitudes but towards the disciples, and said, “Behold My mother and My brethren.” and bearing testimony to the disciples as doing the will of the Father which is in heaven, He added, “He is My brother and sister and mother.” And again in another place it is written, “All the multitude stood on the beach and He spake to them many things in parables.” Then after the parable of the Sowing, it was no longer the multitudes but the disciples who came and said to Him, not “Why speakest thou to us in parables,” but, “Why speakest thou to them in parables.” Then also He answered and said, not to the multitudes but to the disciples, “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to the rest in parables.”

Accordingly; of those who come to the name of Jesus some, who know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, would be called disciples; but those to whom such a privilege is not given would be called multitudes, who would be spoken of as inferior to the disciples. For observe carefully that He said to the disciples, “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” but about the multitudes, “To them it is not given.” And in another place He dismisses the multitudes indeed, and goes into the house, but He does not dismiss the disciples; and there came to Him into His house, not the multitudes but His disciples, saying, “Declare to us the parable of the tares of the field.” Moreover, also, in another place when Jesus heard the things concerning John and withdrew in a boat to a desert place apart, the multitudes followed Him; when He came forth and saw a great multitude He had compassion on them and healed their sick--the sick of the multitudes, not of the disciples. “And when even was come there came to Him,” not the multitudes, but

the disciples, as being different from the multitudes, saying, "Send the multitudes away that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." And, further, when Jesus took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven He blessed and brake the loaves, He gave not to the multitudes but to the disciples, that the disciples might give to the multitudes who were not able to take from Him, but received with difficulty at the hands of the disciples the loaves of the blessing of Jesus, and did not eat even all these; for the multitudes were filled and left that which remained over in twelve baskets which were full.

...

19. Concerning the Seven Loaves. The Narrative of the Feeding of the Four Thousand Compared with that of the Five Thousand.

"And Jesus called unto Him His disciples and said."¹⁹⁹ Above in the similar history to this about the loaves, before the loaves are spoken of, "Jesus came forth and saw a great multitude and had compassion upon them and healed their sick. And when even was come the disciples came to Him saying, The place is desert and the time is already past, send them away,"²⁰⁰ etc. But now after the healing of the deaf and the rest, He takes compassion on the multitude which had continued with Him now three days and had nothing to eat. And there the disciples make request concerning the five thousand;²⁰¹ but here He speaks of His own accord about the four thousand.²⁰² Those, too, are fed when it was evening after they had spent a day with Him; but these, who are testified to have continued with Him three days, partake of the loaves lest they might faint by the way. And there the disciples say to Him when He was not inquiring, that they had only five loaves and two fishes; but here to Him making inquiry, they give answer about the seven loaves and the few small fishes. And there He commands the multitudes to sit down or lie upon the grass; for Luke also wrote, "Make them sit down,"²⁰³ and Mark says, "He commanded them all to sit down;"²⁰⁴ but here He does not command but proclaims²⁰⁵ to the multitude to sit down. Again, there, the three Evangelists say in the very same words that "He took the five loaves and the two fishes and looking up to heaven He blessed;"²⁰⁶ but here, as Matthew and Mark have written, "Jesus gave thanks and brake;"²⁰⁷ there, they recline upon the grass, but here they sit down upon the ground. You will moreover investigate in the accounts in the different places the variation found in John, who wrote in regard to that transaction that Jesus said, "Make the men sit down,"²⁰⁸ and that, having given thanks, He gave of the loaves to them that were set down, but he did not mention this miracle at all.²⁰⁹ Attending, then, to the difference of those things which are written in the various places in regard to the loaves, I think that these belong to a different order from those; wherefore these are fed in a mountain, and those in a desert place; and these after they had continued three days with Jesus, but those one day, on the evening of which they were fed. And further, unless it be the same thing for Jesus to do a thing of Himself and to act after having heard from the disciples, consider if those to whom Jesus shows kindness are not superior when He fed them on the spot with a view to showing them kindness. And, if according to John,²¹⁰ they were barley loaves of which the twelve baskets remained

over, but nothing of this kind is said about these, how are not these superior to the former? And the sick of those He healed,²¹¹ but here He heals these, along with the multitudes, who were not sick but blind, and lame, and deaf, and maimed; wherefore also in regard to these the four thousand marvel,²¹² but in regard to the sick no such thing is said. And these I think who ate of the seven loaves for which thanks were given, are superior to those who ate of the five which were blessed; and these who ate the few little fishes to those who ate of the two, and perhaps also these who sat down upon the ground to those who sat down on the grass. And those from fewer loaves leave twelve baskets, but these from a greater number leave seven baskets, inasmuch, as they were able to receive more. And perhaps these tread upon all earthly things and sit down upon them, but those upon the grass-upon their flesh only-for “all flesh is grass.”²¹³ Consider also after this, that Jesus does not wish to send them away fasting lest they faint on the way, as being without the loaves of Jesus, and while they were still on the way-the way to their own concerns-might suffer injury. Take note also of the cases where Jesus is recorded to have sent any one away, that you may see the difference of those who were sent away by Him after being fed, and those who had been sent away otherwise; and, as a pattern of one who was sent away otherwise, take “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.”²¹⁴ But further the disciples who are always with Jesus are not sent away by Him; but the multitudes after they have eaten are sent away. Likewise, again, the disciples who conceive nothing great about the Canaanitish woman say, “Send her away, for she crieth after us;”²¹⁵ but the Saviour does not at all appear to send her away; for saying unto her, “O woman, great is thy faith, be it done to thee even as thou wilt,”²¹⁶ He healed her daughter from that hour: it is not however written that He sent her away. So far at the present time have we been able to investigate and see into the passage before us.

- 199 Matt. xv. 32.
- 200 Matt. xiv. 15.
- 201 Matt. xiv. 15.
- 202 Matt. xv. 32.
- 203 Luke ix. 14.
- 204 Mark vi. 39.
- 205 ou keleuei alla paraggellei
- 206 Matt. xiv. 19; Mark vi. 41; Luke ix, 16.
- 207 Matt. xv 36; Mark viii. 6.
- 208 John vi. 10.
- 209 Or, did not mention the occasion of this.
- 210 John vi. 13.
- 211 Matt. xiv. 14.
- 212 Matt. xv. 31.
- 213 Isa. xl. 6.
- 214 Luke xiii. 12, Literally `thou art sent away. 0`

215 Matt. xv. 23.

216 Matt. xv. 28.

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A Sermon of St Augustine on the Gospel – 4th of Lent

1. The miracles performed by our Lord Jesus Christ are indeed divine works, and incite the human mind to rise to the apprehension of God from the things that are seen. But inasmuch as He is not such a substance as may be seen with the eyes, and His miracles in the government of the whole world and the administration of the universal creation are, by their familiar constancy, slightly regarded, so that almost no man deigns to consider the wonderful and stupendous works of God, exhibited in every grain of seed; He has, agreeably to His mercy, reserved to Himself certain works, beyond the usual course and order of nature, which He should perform on fit occasion, that they, by whom His daily works are lightly esteemed, might be struck with astonishment at beholding, not indeed greater, but uncommon works. For certainly the government of the whole world is a greater miracle than the satisfying of five thousand men with five loaves; and yet no man wonders at the former; but the latter men wonder at, not because it is greater, but because it is rare. For who even now feeds the whole world, but He who creates the cornfield from a few grains? He therefore created as God creates. For, whence He multiplies the produce of the fields from a few grains, from the same source He multiplied in His hands the five loaves. The power, indeed, was in the hands of Christ; but those five loaves were as seeds, not indeed committed to the earth, but multiplied by Him who made the earth. In this miracle, then, there is that brought near to the senses, whereby the mind should be roused to attention, there is exhibited to the eyes, whereon the understanding should be exercised, that we might admire the invisible God through His visible works; and being raised to faith and purged by faith, we might desire to behold Him even invisibly, whom invisible we came to know by the things that are visible.

2. Yet it is not enough to observe these things in the miracles of Christ. Let us interrogate the miracles themselves, what they tell us about Christ: for they have a tongue of their own, if they can be understood. For since Christ is Himself the Word of God, even the act of the Word is a word to us. Therefore as to this miracle, since we have heard how great it is, let us also search how profound it is; let us not only be delighted with its surface, but let us also seek to know its depth. This miracle, which we admire on the outside, has something within. We have seen, we have looked at something great, something glorious, and altogether divine, which could be performed only by God: we have praised the doer for the deed. But just as, if we were to inspect a beautiful writing somewhere, it would not suffice for us to praise the hand of the writer, because he formed the letters even, equal, and elegant, if we did not also read the information he conveyed to us by those letters; so, he who merely inspects this deed may be delighted with its beauty

to admire the doer: but he who understands does, as it were, read it. For a picture is looked at in a different way from that in which a writing is looked at. When thou hast seen a picture, to have seen and praised it is the whole thing; when thou seest a writing, this is not the whole, since thou art reminded also to read it. Moreover, when thou seest a writing, if it chance that thou canst not read, thou sayest, "What do we think that to be which is here written?" Thou askest what it is, when already thou seest it to be something. He of whom thou seekest to be informed what it is that thou hast seen, will show thee another thing. He has other eyes than thou hast. Do you not alike see the form of the letters? But yet you do not alike understand the signs. Well, thou seest and praisest; but he sees, praises, reads, and understands. Therefore, since we have seen and praised, let us also read and understand.

3. The Lord on the mount: much rather let us understand that the Lord on the mount is the Word on high. Accordingly, what was done on the mount does not, as it were, lie low, nor is to be cursorily passed by, but must be looked up to. He saw the multitude, knew them to be hungering, mercifully fed them: not only in virtue of His goodness, but also of His power. For what would mere goodness avail, where there was not bread with which to feed the hungry crowd? Did not power attend upon goodness, that crowd had remained fasting and hungry. In short, the disciples also, who were with the Lord, and hungry, themselves wished to feed the multitudes, that they might not remain empty, but had not wherewithal to feed them. The Lord asked, whence they might buy bread to feed the multitude. And the Scripture saith: "And this he said to try him;" namely, the disciple Philip of whom He had asked; "for he himself knew what he would do." Of what advantage then was it to prove him, unless to show the disciple's ignorance? And, perhaps, in showing the disciple's ignorance He signified something more. This will appear, then, when the sacrament of the five loaves itself will begin to speak to us, and to intimate its meaning: for there we shall see why the Lord in this act wished to exhibit the disciple's ignorance, by asking what He Himself knew. For we sometimes ask what we do not know, that, being willing to hear, we may learn; sometimes we ask what we do know, wishing to learn whether he whom we ask also knows. The Lord knew both the one and the other; knew both what He asked, for He knew what Himself would do; and He also knew in like manner that Philip knew not this. Why then did He ask, but to show Philip's ignorance? And why He did this, we shall, as I have said, understand afterwards.

4. Andrew saith: "There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many?" When Philip, on being asked, had said that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice to refresh that so great a multitude, there was there a certain lad, carrying five barley loaves and two fishes. "Then Jesus said: Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. The men therefore sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves: and when he had given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down." He commanded, the loaves were broken, and put before the men that were set down. It was no longer five loaves, but what He had added thereto, who had created that which was increased. "And of the fishes as much as

sufficed.” It was not enough that the multitude had been satisfied, there remained also fragments; and these were ordered to be gathered up, that they should not be lost: “And they filled twelve baskets with the fragments.”

5. To run over it briefly: by the five loaves are understood the five books of Moses; and rightly are they not wheaten but barley loaves, because they belong to the Old Testament. And you know that barley is so formed that we get at its pith with difficulty; for the pith is covered in a coating of husk, and the husk itself tenacious and closely adhering, so as to be stripped off with labor. Such is the letter of the Old Testament, invested in a covering of carnal sacraments: but yet, if we get at its pith, it feeds and satisfies us. A certain lad, then, brought five loaves and two fishes. If we inquire who this lad was, perhaps it was the people Israel, which, in a childish sense, carried, not ate. For the things which they carried were a burden while shut up, but when opened afforded nourishment. And as for the two fishes, they appear to us to signify those two sublime persons, in the Old Testament, of priest and of ruler, who were anointed for the sanctifying and governing of the people. And at length Himself in the mystery came, who was signified by those persons: He at length came who was pointed out by the pith of the barley, but concealed by its husk. He came, sustaining in His one person the two characters of priest and ruler: of priest by offering Himself to God as a victim for us; of ruler, because by Him we are governed. And the things that were carried closed are now opened up. Thanks be to Him. He has fulfilled by Himself what was promised in the Old Testament. And He bade the loaves to be broken; in the breaking they are multiplied. Nothing is more true. For when those five books of Moses are expounded, how many books have they made by being broken up, as it were; that is, by being opened and laid out? But because in that barley the ignorance of the first people was veiled, of whom it is said, “Whilst Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts;” for the veil was not yet removed, because Christ had not yet come; not yet was the veil of the temple rent, while Christ is hanging on the cross: because, I say, the ignorance of the people was in the law, therefore that proving by the Lord made the ignorance of the disciple manifest.

6. Wherefore nothing is without meaning; everything is significant, but requires one that understands: for even this number of the people fed, signified the people that were under the law. For why were there five thousand, but because they were under the law, which is unfolded in the five books of Moses? Why were the sick laid at those five porches, but not healed? He, however, there cured the impotent man, who here fed multitudes with five loaves. Moreover, they sat down upon the grass; therefore understood carnally, and rested in the carnal. “For all flesh is grass.” And what were those fragments, but things which the people were not able to eat? We understand them to be certain matters of more hidden meaning, which the multitude are not able to take in. What remains then, but that those matters of more hidden meaning, which the multitude cannot take in, be entrusted to men who are fit to teach others also, just as were the apostles? Why were twelve baskets filled? This was done both marvellously, because a great thing was done; and it was done profitably, because a spiritual thing was done. They who at the time saw it, marvelled; but

we, hearing of it, do not marvel. For it was done that they might see it, but it was written that we might hear it. What the eyes were able to do in their case, that faith does in our case. We perceive, namely, with the mind, what we could not with the eyes: and we are preferred before them, because of us it is said, “Blessed are they who see not, and yet believe.” And I add that, perhaps, we have understood what that crowd did not understand. And we have been fed in reality, in that we have been able to get at the pith of the barley.

7. Lastly, what did those men who saw this miracle think? “The men,” saith he, “when they had seen the sign which He had done, said, This is indeed a prophet.” Perhaps they still thought Christ to be a prophet for this reason, namely, that they were sitting on the grass. But He was the Lord of the prophets, the fulfiller of the prophets, the sanctifier of the prophets, but yet a prophet also: for it was said to Moses, “I will raise up for them a prophet like unto thee.” Like, according to the flesh, but not according to the majesty. And that this promise of the Lord is to be understood concerning Christ Himself, is clearly expounded and read in the Acts of the Apostles. And the Lord says of Himself, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country.” The Lord is a prophet, and the Lord is God’s Word, and no prophet prophesies without the Word of God: the Word of God is with the prophets, and the Word of God is a prophet. The former times obtained prophets inspired and filled by the Word of God: we have obtained the very Word of God for our prophet. But Christ is in such manner a prophet, the Lord of prophets, as Christ is an angel, the Lord of angels. For He is also called the Angel of great counsel. Nevertheless, what says the prophet elsewhere that not an ambassador, nor an angel, but Himself coming will save them; that is, He will not send an ambassador to save them, nor an angel, but Himself will come. Who will come? The Angel himself? Certainly not by an angel will He save them, except that He is so an angel, as also Lord of angels. For angels signify messengers. If Christ brought no message, He would not be called an angel: if Christ prophesied nothing, He would not be called a prophet. He has exhorted us to faith and to laying hold of eternal life; He has proclaimed something present, foretold something future because He proclaimed the present, thence He was an angel or messenger; because He foretold the future, thence He was a prophet; and that, as the Word of God He was made flesh, thence He was Lord of angels and of prophets.

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A Sermon of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel – 4th of Lent

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is that of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw the miracles which he did on them that were diseased. Jesus therefore went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. Now the pasch, the festival day of the Jews, was near at hand. When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes, and seen that a very great multitude cometh to him, he said to Philip: Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to try him; for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him: Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of

Simon Peter, saith to him: There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many? Then Jesus said: Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. The men therefore sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves: and when he had given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down. In like manner also of the fishes, as much as they would. And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost. They gathered up therefore, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above to them that had eaten. Now those men, when they had seen what a miracle Jesus had done, said: This is of a truth the prophet, that is to come into the world. Jesus therefore, when he knew that they would come to take him by force, and make him king, fled again into the mountain himself alone.

Beloved, let us not contend with violent men, but learn when the doing so brings no hurt to our virtue to give place to their evil counsels; for so all their hardihood is checked. As darts when they fall upon a firm, hard, and resisting substance, rebound with great violence on those who throw them, but when the violence of the cast hath nothing to oppose it, it soon becometh weaker and ceaseth, so is it with insolent men; when we contend with them they become the fiercer, but when we yield and give ground, we easily abate all their madness. Wherefore the Lord when He knew that the Pharisees had heard “that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,” went into Galilee, to quench their envy, and to soften by His retirement the wrath which was likely to be engendered by these reports. And when He departed for the second time into Galilee, He cometh not to the same places as before; for He went not to Cana, but to “the other side of the sea,” and great multitudes followed Him, beholding “the miracles which He did.” What miracles? Why doth he not mention them specifically? Because this Evangelist most of all was desirous of employing the greater part of his book on the discourses and sermons [of Christ]. Observe, for instance, how for a whole year, or rather how even now at the feast of the Passover, he hath given us no more information on the head of miracles, than merely that He healed the paralytic and the nobleman’s son. Because he was not anxious to enumerate them all, (that would have been impossible,) but of many and great to record a few.

“*And a great multitude followed him, because they saw the miracles which he did on them that were diseased.*” What is here told marks not a very wise state of mind; for when they had enjoyed such teaching, they still were more attracted by the miracles, which was a sign of the grosser state. For “miracles,” It saith, “are not for believers, but for unbelievers.” The people described by Matthew acted not thus, but how? They all, he saith “were astonished at His doctrine, because He taught as one having authority.” (Matt. vii. 28, 29.)

“And why doth He occupy the mountain now, and sit there with His disciples?” Because of the miracle which was about to take place. And that the disciples alone went up with Him, was a charge against the multitude which followed Him not. Yet not for this only did He go up into the mountain, but to teach us ever to rest at intervals from the tumults and confusion of common life. For solitude is a thing meet for the study of wisdom. And often doth He go up alone into a mountain, and spend the night there, and pray, to teach us that the man who will come most near to God must be free from all disturbance, and must seek times and places clear of confusion.

“*Now the pasch, the festival day of the Jews, was near at hand.*”

“How then,” saith some one, “doth He not go up unto the feast, but, when all are pressing to Jerusalem, goeth Himself into Galilee, and not Himself alone, but taketh His disciples with Him, and proceedeth thence to Capernaum?” Because henceforth He was quietly annulling the Law, taking occasion from the wickedness of the Jews.

“*When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes, and seen that a very great multitude cometh to Him, he said to Philip: Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to try him; for he himself knew what he would do.*”

This showeth that He sat not at any time idly with the disciples, but perhaps carefully conversing with them, and making them attend and turn towards Him, a thing which peculiarly marks His tender care, and the humility and condescension of His demeanor towards them. For they sat with Him, perhaps looking at one another; then having lifted up His eyes, He beheld the multitudes coming unto Him. Now the other Evangelists say, that the disciples came and asked and besought Him that He would not send them away fasting, while St. John saith, that the question was put to Philip by Christ. Both occurrences seem to me to be truly reported, but not to have taken place at the same time, the former account being prior to the other, so that the two are entirely different.

Wherefore then doth He ask "Philip"? He knew which of His disciples needed most instruction; for this is he who afterwards said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (c. xiv. 8), and on this account Jesus was beforehand bringing him into a proper state. For had the miracle simply been done, the marvel would not have seemed so great, but now He beforehand constraineth him to confess the existing want, that knowing the state of matters he might be the more exactly acquainted with the magnitude of the miracle about to take place. Wherefore He saith,

"Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

So in the Old [Testament] He spake to Moses, for He wrought not the sign until He had asked him, "What is that in thy hand?" Because things coming to pass unexpectedly and all at once, are wont to throw us into forgetfulness of things previous, therefore He first involved him in a confession of present circumstances, that when the astonishment should have come upon him, he might be unable afterwards to drive away the remembrance of what he had confessed, and thus might learn by comparison the greatness of the miracle, which in fact takes place in this instance; for Philip being asked, replied,

"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do."

What meaneth, "to prove him"? Did not He know what would be said by him? We cannot assert that. What then is the meaning of the expression? We may discover it from the Old [Testament]. For there too it is said, "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Take thy beloved son whom thou lovest" (Gen. xxii. 1, Gen. xxii. 2); yet it doth not appear in that place either, that when He saith this He waited to see the end of the trial, whether Abraham would obey or not, (how could He, who knoweth all things before they come into existence? But the words in both cases are spoken after the manner of men. For as when (the Psalmist) saith that He "searcheth the hearts of men," he meaneth not a search of ignorance but of exact knowledge, just so when the Evangelist saith that He proved (Philip), he meaneth only that He knew exactly. And perhaps one might say another thing, that as He once made Abraham more approved, so also did He this man, bringing, him by this question to an exact knowledge of the miracle. The Evangelist therefore, that thou mayest not stop at the feebleness of the expression, and so form an improper opinion of what was said, addeth, "He Himself knew what He would do."

Moreover we must observe this, that when there is any wrong suspicion, the writer straightway very carefully corrects it. As then in this place that the hearers might not form any such suspicion, he adds the corrective, saying, "For He Himself knew what He would do": so also in that other place, when He saith, that "the Jews persecuted Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God," had there not been the assertion of Christ Himself confirmed by His works, he would there also have subjoined this correction. For if even in words which Christ speaketh the Evangelist is careful that none should have suspicions, much more in cases where others were speaking of Him would he have looked closely, had he perceived that an improper opinion prevailed concerning Him. But he did not so, for he knew that this was His meaning, and immovable decree. Therefore after saying, "making Himself equal with God," he used not any such correction; for the matter spoken of was not an erroneous fancy of theirs, but His own assertion ratified by His works. Philip then having been questioned,

“One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, saith to him: There is a boy here that hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many?”

Andrew is higher minded than Philip, yet had not he attained to everything. Yet I do not think that he spake without an object, but as having heard of the miracles of the Prophets, and how Elisha wrought a sign with the loaves (2 Kings iv. 43); on this account he mounted to a certain height, but could not attain to the very top.

Let us learn then, we who give ourselves to luxury, what was the fare of those great and admirable men; and in quality and quantity let us behold and imitate the thriftiness of their table.

What follows also expresses great weakness. For after saying, “hath five barley loaves,” he addeth, “but what are they among so many?” He supposed that the Worker of the miracle would make less out of less, and more out of more. But this was not the case, for it was alike easy to Him to cause bread to spring forth from more and from less, since He needed no subject-matter. But in order that the creation might not seem foreign to His Wisdom, as afterwards slanderers and those affected with the disease of Marcion said, He used the creation itself as a groundwork for His marvels.

When both the disciples had owned themselves at a loss, then He wrought the miracle; If or thus they profited the more, having first confessed the difficulty of the matter, that when it should come to pass, they might understand the power of God. And because a miracle was about to be wrought, which had also been performed by the Prophets, although not in an equal degree, and because He would do it after first giving thanks, lest they should fall into any suspicion of weakness on His part, observe how by the very manner of His working He entirely raiseth their thoughts of it and showeth them the difference (between Himself and others). For when the loaves had not yet appeared, that thou mayest learn, that things that are not are to Him as though they were, (as Paul saith, “who calleth the things that be not as though they were”-Rom. iv. 17.) He commanded them as though the table were prepared and ready, straightway to sit down, rousing by this the minds of His disciples. And because they had profited by the questioning, they immediately obeyed, and were not confounded, nor said, “How is this, why dost Thou bid us sit down, when there is nothing before us?” The same men, who at first disbelieved so much as to say, “Whence shall we buy bread?” began so far to believe even before they saw the miracle, that they readily made the multitudes to sit down.

But why when He was about to restore the paralytic did He not pray, nor when He was raising the dead, or bridling the sea, while He doth so here over the loaves? It was to show that when we begin our meals, we ought to give thanks unto God. Moreover, He doth it especially in a lesser matter, that thou mayest learn that He doth it not as having any need; for were this the case, much more would He have done so in greater things; but when He did them by His own authority, it is clear that it was through condescension that He acted as He did in the case of the lesser. Besides, a great multitude was present, and it was necessary that they should be persuaded that He had come according to the will of God. Wherefore, when He doth miracles in the absence of witnesses, He exhibiteth nothing of the kind; but when He doth them in the presence of many, in order to persuade them that He is no enemy of God, no adversary of Him who hath begotten Him, He removeth the suspicion by thanksgiving.

“And He gave to them that were set down, and they were filled.”

Seest thou how great is the interval between the servants and the Master? They having grace by measure, wrought their miracles accordingly, but God, who acteth with free power, did all most abundantly.

“And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost. They gathered up therefore, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above to them that had eaten .”

This was not a superfluous show, but in order that the matter might not be deemed a mere illusion; and for this reason He createth from matter already subsisting. “But why gave He not the bread to the multitudes to bear, but (only) to His disciples?” Because He was most desirous to instruct these who were

to be the teachers of the world. The multitude would not as yet reap any great fruit from the miracles, (at least they straightway forgot this one and asked for another,) while these would gain no common profit. And what took place was moreover no ordinary condemnation of Judas, who bore a basket. And that these things were done for their instruction is plain from what is said afterwards, when He reminded them, saying, "Do ye not yet understand-how many baskets ye took up?" (Matt. xvi. 9.) And for the same reason it was that the baskets of fragments were equal in number to the disciples; afterwards, when they were instructed, they took not up so many, but only "seven baskets." (Matt. xv. 37.) And I marvel not only at the quantity of loaves created, but besides the quantity, at the exactness of the surplus, that He caused the superabundance to be neither more nor less than just so much as He willed, fore-seeing how much they would consume; a thing which marked unspeakable power. The fragments then confirmed the matter, showing both these points; that what had taken place was no illusion, and that these were from the loaves by which the people had been fed. As to the fishes, they at this time were produced from those already subsisting, but at a later period, after the Resurrection, they were not made from subsisting matter. "Wherefore?" That thou mayest understand that even now He employed matter, not from necessity, nor as needing any base (to work upon), but to stop the mouths of heretics?

"And the multitudes said, that this is of a truth The Prophet."

Oh, excess of gluttony! He had done ten thousand things more admirable than this, but nowhere did they make this confession, save when they had been filled. Yet hence it is evident that they expected some remarkable prophet; for those others had said (to John), "Art thou that Prophet?" while these say, "This is that Prophet."

"Jesus therefore, when he knew that they would come to take him by force, and make him king, fled again into the mountain himself alone."

Wonderful! How great is the tyranny of gluttony, how great the fickleness of men's minds! No longer do they vindicate the Law, no longer do they care for the violation of the Sabbath, no longer are they zealous for God; all such considerations are thrown aside, when their bellies have been filled; He was a prophet in their eyes, and they were about to choose Him for a king. But Christ fleeth. "Wherefore?" To teach us to despise worldly dignities, and to show us that He needed nothing on earth. For He who chose all things mean, both mother and house and city and nurture and attire would not afterwards be made illustrious by things on earth. The things which (He had) from heaven were glorious and great, angels, a star, His Father loudly speaking, the Spirit testifying, and Prophets proclaiming Him from afar; those on earth were all mean, that thus His power might the more appear. He came also to teach us to despise the things of the world, and not be amazed or astonished by the splendors of this life, but to laugh them all to scorn, and to desire those which are to come. For he who admires things which are here, will not admire those in the heavens. Wherefore also He saith to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (c. xviii. 36), that He may not afterwards appear to have employed mere human terror or dominion for the purpose of persuasion. Why then saith the Prophet, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass"? (Zech. ix. 9.) He spake of that Kingdom which is in the heavens, but not of this on earth; and on this account Christ saith, "I receive not honor from men." (c. v. 41.)

Learn we then, beloved, to despise and not to desire the honor which is from men for we have been honored with the greatest of honors, compared with which that other is verily insult, ridicule, and mockery. And as the riches of this world compared with the riches of that are poverty, as this life apart from that is deadness, (for "let the dead bury their dead"-Matt. viii. 28,) so this honor compared with that is shame and ridicule. Let us then not pursue it. If they who confer it are of less account than a shadow or a dream, the honor itself much more so. "The glory of man is as the flower of the grass" (1 Pet. i. 24); and what is meaner than the flower of the grass? Were this glory everlasting, in what could it profit the soul? In nothing. Nay, it very greatly injures us by making us slaves, slaves in worse condition than those bought with money, slaves who obey not one master only, but two, three, ten thousand, all giving different commands. How much better is it to be a free man than a slave, to be free from the slavery of

men, and subject only to the dominion of God? In a word, if thou wilt desire glory, desire it, but let it be the glory immortal, for that is exhibited on a more glorious stage, and brings greater profit. For the men here bid thee be at charges to please them, but Christ, on the contrary, giveth thee an hundredfold for what thou givest Him, and addeth moreover eternal life. Which of the two then is better, to be admired on earth, or in heaven? by man, or by God? to your loss, or to your gain? to wear a crown for a single day, or for endless ages? Give to him that needeth, but give not to a dancer, lest thou lose thy money and destroy his soul. For thou art the cause of his (coming to) perdition through unseasonable munificence. Since did those on the stage know that their employment would be unprofitable, they would have long ago ceased to practice it; but when they behold thee applauding, crowding after them, spending and wasting thy substance upon them, even if they have no desire to follow (their profession), they are kept to it by the desire of gain. If they knew that no one would praise what they do, they would soon desist from their labors, by reason of their unprofitableness; but when they see that the action is admired by many, the praise of others becomes a bait to them. Let us then desist from this unprofitable expense, let us learn upon whom and when we ought to spend. Let us not, I implore you, provoke God in both ways, gathering whence we ought not, and scattering where we ought not; for what anger doth not thy conduct deserve, when thou passest by the poor and givest to a harlot? Would not the paying the hire of sin and the bestowing honor where it were meet to punish have been a charge against thee, even hadst thou paid out of thy just earnings? But when thou feedest thine uncleanness by stripping orphans and wronging widows, consider how great a fire is prepared for those who dare such things. Hear what Paul saith, "Who not only do these things, but also have pleasure in them that do them." (Rom. i. 32.)

Perhaps we have touched you sharply, yet if we touch you not, there are actual punishments awaiting those who sin without amendment. What then availeth it to gratify by words those who shall be punished by realities? Dost thou take pleasure at a dancer, dost thou praise and admire him? Then art thou worse than he; his poverty affords him an excuse though not a reasonable one, but thou art stripped even of this defense. If I ask him, "Why hast thou left other arts and come to this accursed and impure one?" he will reply, "because I can with little labor gain great profits." But if I ask thee why thou admirest one who spends his time in impurity, and lives to the mischief of many, thou canst not run to the same excuse, but must bow down thy face and be ashamed and blush. Now if when called by us to give account, thou wouldest have nothing to reply, when that terrible and inexorable Judgment cometh where we shall render account of thoughts and deeds and everything, how shall we stand? With what eyes shall we behold our Judge? What shall we say? What defense shall we make? What excuse reasonable or unreasonable shall we put forward? Shall we allege the expense? the gratification? the perdition of others whom by means of his art we ruin? We can have nothing to say, but must be punished with a punishment having no end, knowing no limit. That this come not to pass, let us henceforth guard all points, that having departed with a good hope, we may obtain the everlasting blessings; to which may we all attain through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever and world without end, Amen.

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A Commentary of St John Chrysostom on the Epistle –4th of Lent- Galatians 4: 22-31

For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, and the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman, was born according to the flesh: but he of the free woman, was by promise. Which things are said by an allegory. For these are the two testaments. The one from mount Sina, engendering unto bondage; which is Agar: For Sina is a mountain in Arabia, which hath affinity to that Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But that Jerusalem, which is above, is free: which is our mother. For it is written: Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not: break forth and cry,

thou that travailest not: for many are the children of the desolate, more than of her that hath a husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he, that was born according to the flesh, persecuted him that was after the spirit; so also it is now. But what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free: by the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free.

“Tell me,” he says, “ye that desire to be under the Law, do ye not hear the Law?”

He says rightly, “ye that desire,” for the matter was not one of a proper and orderly succession of things but of their own unseasonable contentiousness. It is the Book of Creation which he here calls the Law, which name he often gives to the whole Old Testament.

“For it is written (Gen. xv: 16.) that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, and the other by a free woman.”

He returns again to Abraham, not in the way of repetition, but, inasmuch as the Patriarch’s fame was great among the Jews, to show that the types had their origin from thence, and that present events were pictured aforetime in him. Having previously shown that the Galatians were sons of Abraham, now, in that the Patriarch’s sons were not of equal dignity, one being by a bondwoman, the other by a free-woman, he shows that they were not only his sons, but sons in the same sense as he that was freeborn and noble. Such is the power of Faith.

“But he who was of the bondwoman, was born according to the flesh: but he of the free woman, was by promise.”

What is the meaning of “after the flesh?” Having said that Faith united us to Abraham, and it having seemed incredible to his hearers, that those who were not begotten by Abraham should be called his sons, he proves that this paradox had actually happened long ago; for that Isaac, born not according to the order of nature, nor the law of marriage, nor the power of the flesh, was yet truly his own son. He was the issue of bodies that were dead, and of a womb that was dead; his conception was not by the flesh, nor his birth by the seed, for the womb was dead both through age and barrenness, but the Word of God fashioned Him. Not so in the case of the bondman; He came by virtue of the laws of nature, and after the manner of marriage. Nevertheless, he that was not according to the flesh was more honorable than he that was born after the flesh. Therefore let it not disturb you that ye are not born after the flesh; for from the very reason that ye are not so born, are ye most of all Abraham’s kindred. The being born after the flesh renders one not more honorable, but less so, for a birth not after the flesh is more marvellous and more spiritual. And this is plain from the case of those who were born of old time; Ishmael, for instance, who was born according to the flesh, was not only a bondman, but was cast out of his father’s house; but Isaac, who was born according to the promise, being a true son and free, was lord of all.

“Which things are said by an allegory.”

Contrary to usage, he calls a type an allegory; his meaning is as follows; this history not only declares that which appears on the face of it, but announces somewhat farther, whence it is called an allegory. And what hath it announced? no less than all the things now present.

“For these are the two testaments. The one from mount Sina, engendering unto bondage; which is Agar.”

“These:” who? the mothers of those children, Sarah and Agar; and what are they? Two covenants, two laws. As the names of the women were given in the history, he abides by this designation of the two races, showing how much follows from the very names. How from the names?

“For Sina is a mountain in Arabia:”

The bond-woman was called Agar, and “Agar” is the word for Mount Sinai in the language of that country. So that it is necessary that all who are born of the Old Covenant should be bondmen, for that

mountain where the Old Covenant was delivered hath a name in common with the bondwoman. And it includes Jerusalem, for this is the meaning of, "which hath affinity to that Jerusalem which now is."

That is, it borders on, and is contiguous to it.

"For she is in bondage with her children."

What follows from hence? Not only that she was in bondage and brought forth bondmen, but that this Covenant is so too, whereof the bondwoman was a type. For Jerusalem is adjacent to the mountain of the same name with the bondwoman, and in this mountain the Covenant was delivered. Now where is the type of Sarah?

"But that Jerusalem, which is above, is free: which is our mother."

Those therefore, who are born of her are not bondmen. Thus the type of the Jerusalem below was Agar, as is plain from the mountain being so called; but of that which is above is the Church. Nevertheless he is not content with these types, but adds the testimony of Isaiah to what he has spoken. Having said that Jerusalem which is above "is our Mother," and having given that name to the Church, he cites the suffrage of the Prophet in his favor,

"For it is written: Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not: break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for many are the children of the desolate, more than of her that hath a husband." (*Isa. liv: 1.*)

Who is this who before was "barren," and "desolate?" Clearly it is the Church of the Gentiles, that was before deprived of the knowledge of God? Who, "she which hath the husband?" plainly the Synagogue. Yet the barren woman surpassed her in the number of her children, for the other embraces one nation, but the children of the Church have filled the country of the Greeks and of the Barbarians, the earth and sea, the whole habitable world. Observe how Sarah by acts, and the Prophet by words, have described the events about to befall us. Observe too, that he whom Isaiah called barren, Paul hath proved to have many children, which also happened typically in the case of Sarah. For she too, although barren, became the mother of a numerous progeny. This however does not suffice Paul, but he carefully follows out the mode whereby the barren woman became a mother, that in this particular likewise the type might harmonize with the truth. Wherefore he adds: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

It is not merely that the Church was barren like Sarah, or became a mother of many children like her, but she bore them in the way Sarah did. As it was not nature but the promise of God which rendered Sarah a mother, [for the word of God which said, "At the time appointed I will return unto thee, and Sarah shall have a son," (*Gen. xviii: 14.*) this entered into the womb and formed the babe,] so also in our regeneration it is not nature, but the Words of God spoken by the Priest, (the faithful know them,) which in the Bath of water as in a sort of womb, form and regenerate him who is baptized.

Wherefore if we are sons of the barren woman, then are we free. But what kind of freedom, it might be objected, is this, when the Jews seize and scourge the believers, and those who have this pretence of liberty are persecuted? For these things then occurred, in the persecution of the faithful. Neither let this disturb you, he replies, this also is anticipated in the type, for Isaac, who was free, was persecuted by Ishmael the bondman. Wherefore he adds, "But as then he, that was born according to the flesh, persecuted him that was after the spirit; so also it is now. But what saith the scripture? (*Gen. xxi: 10.*) Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman."

What! does all this consolation consist in showing that freemen are persecuted by bond-men? By no means, he says, I do not stop here, listen to what follows, and then, if you be not pusillanimous under persecution, you will be sufficiently comforted. And what is it that follows? "Cast out the son of the handmaid, for he shall not inherit with the son of the freewoman." Behold the reward of tyranny for a season, and of recklessness out of season! The son is cast out of his father's house, and becomes, together with his mother, an exile and a wanderer. And consider too the wisdom of the remark; for he says not that he was cast forth merely because he persecuted, but that he should not be heir. For this punishment was

not exacted from him on account of his temporary persecution, (for that would have been of little moment, and nothing to the point,) but he was not suffered to participate in the inheritance provided for the son. And this proves that, putting the persecution aside, this very thing had been typified from the beginning, and did not originate in the persecution, but in the purpose of God. Nor does he say, “the son of Abraham shall not be heir,” but, “the son of the bondwoman,” distinguishing him by his inferior descent. Now Sarah was barren, and so is the Gentile Church; observe how the type is preserved in every particular, as the former, through all the by-gone years, conceived not, and in extreme old age became a mother, so the latter, when the fulness of time is come, brings forth. And this the prophets have proclaimed, saying, “Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for more are the children of the desolate than of her which hath the husband.” And hereby they intend the Church; for she knew not God, but as soon as she knew Him, she surpassed the fruitful synagogue.

“So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free: by the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free.”

He turns and discusses this on all sides, desiring to prove that what had taken place was no novelty, but had been before typified many ages ago. How then can it be otherwise than absurd for those who had been set apart so long and who had obtained freedom, willingly to subject themselves to the yoke of bondage?

Next he states another inducement to them to abide in his doctrine.

Chapter V.

Verse 1. - “Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage.”

Have ye wrought your own deliverance, that ye run back again to the dominion ye were under before? It is Another who hath redeemed you, it is Another who hath paid the ransom for you. Observe in how many ways he leads them away from the error of Judaism; by showing, first, that it was the extreme of folly for those, who had become free instead of slaves, to desire to become slaves instead of free; secondly, that they would be convicted of neglect and ingratitude to their Benefactor, in despising Him who had delivered, and loving him who had enslaved them; thirdly, that it was impossible. For Another having once for all redeemed all of us from it, the Law ceases to have any sway. By the word, “stand fast,” he indicates their vacillation.

By the word “yoke” he signifies to them the burdensomeness of such a course, and by the word “again” he points out their utter senselessness. Had ye never experienced this burden, ye would not have deserved so severe a censure, but for you who by trial have learnt how irksome this yoke is, again to subject yourself to it, is justly unpardonable.

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