

Saint Thomas on the 6th Sunday after Pentecost – from the Catena Aurea

In those days again, when there was a great multitude, and had nothing to eat; calling his disciples together, he saith to them: I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. And if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way; for some of them came from afar off. And his disciples answered him: From whence can any one fill them here with bread in the wilderness? And he asked them: How many loaves have ye? Who said: Seven. And taking the seven loaves, giving thanks, he broke, and gave to his disciples for to set before them; and they set them before the people. And they had a few little fishes; and he blessed them, and commanded them to be set before them. And they did eat and were filled; and they took up that which was left of the fragments, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand; and he sent them away.

THEOPHYL. After the Lord had performed the former miracle concerning the multiplication of the loaves, now again, a fitting occasion presents itself, and He takes the opportunity of working a similar miracle; wherefore it is said, In those days, the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. For He did not always work miracles concerning the feeding of the multitude, lest they should follow Him for the sake of food; now therefore He would not have performed this miracle if He had not seen that the multitude was in danger. Wherefore it goes on: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint on the way: for divers of them came from far.

BEDE; Why they who came from afar hold out for three days Matthew says more fully: And he went up to a mountain and sat down there, and great multitudes came to him having with them many sick persons, and cast them down at Jesus feet, to be healed them.

THEOPHYL. The disciples cannot yet understand, nor did they believe in His virtue, notwithstanding former miracles, wherefore it continues, And his disciples said to him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? But the Lord Himself does not blame them teaching us that we should not be grievously angry with ignorant men and those who do not understand, but bear with their ignorance.

After this it continues, And He asked them, How many loaves have you? and they answered, Seven.

REMIG. Ignorance was not His reason for asking them, but that from their answering seven, the miracle might be noised abroad, and become more known in proportion to the smallness of the number. It goes on: And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground. In the former feeding they lay on grass, in this one on the ground. It continues, And he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks and broke. In giving thanks, He has left us an example, that for all gifts conferred on us from heaven we should return thanks to Him. And it is to be remarked, that our Lord did not give the bread to the people, but to His disciples, and the disciples to the people; for it goes on, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And not only the bread, but the fish also He blessed, and ordered to be set before them. For there comes after, And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

BEDE; In this passage then we should notice, in one and the same our redeemer, a distinct operation of Divinity and our Manhood; thus the error, of Eutyches, who presumes to lay down the doctrine of one only operation in Christ, is to be cast out far from the Christian pale. For who does not here see that the pity of our Lord for the multitude is the feeling and sympathy of humanity; and that at the same time His satisfying four thousand men with seven loaves and a few fishes, is a work of Divine virtue? It goes on, And they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

THEOPHYL. The multitudes who ate and were filled did not take with them the remains of the loaves, but the disciples took them up, as they did before the baskets. In which we learn according to the narration, that we should be content with what is sufficient, and not look for anything beyond. The number of those who ate is put down, when it is said, And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away; where we may see that Christ sends no one away fasting, for He wishes all to be nourished by His grace.

BEDE; The typical difference between this feeding and the other of the five loaves and two fishes, is, that there the letter of the Old Testament, full of spiritual grace, is signified, but here the truth and grace of the New Testament, which is to be ministered to all the faithful, is pointed out. Now the multitude remains three days, waiting for the Lord to heal their sick as Matthew relates, when the elect, in the faith of the Holy Trinity, supplicate for sins, with persevering earnestness; or because they turn themselves to the Lord in deed, in word, and in thought.

THEOPHYL. Or by those who wait for three days, He means the baptized; for baptism is called illumination, and is performed by trine immersion.

GREG. He does not however wish to dismiss them fasting, lest they should faint by the way; for it is necessary that men should find in what is preached the word of consolation, lest hungering through want of the food of truth, they sink under the toil of this life.

AMBROSE; The good Lord indeed whilst He requires diligence, gives strength; nor will He dismiss the fasting, lest they faint by the way, that is, either in the course of this life, or before they have reached the fountain-head of life, that is, the Father, and have learnt that Christ is of the Father, lest haply, after, receiving that He is born of a virgin, they begin to esteem His virtue not that of God, but of man. Therefore the Lord Jesus divides the food, and His will indeed is the give to all, to deny none; He is the Dispenser of all things, but if you refuse to stretch forth your hand to receive the food, you will faint by the way, nor can you find fault with Him, who pities and divides.

BEDE; But they who return to repentance after the crimes of the flesh, after thefts, violence, and murders, come to the Lord from afar; for in proportion as a man has wandered farther in evil working, so he has ventured farther from Almighty God. The believers amongst the Gentiles came from afar to Christ, but the Jews from near, for they had been taught concerning Him by the letter of the law and the prophets. In the former case, however, of time feeding with five loaves, the multitude lay upon the green grass; here, however, upon the ground, because by the writing of the law, we are ordered to keep under the desires of the flesh, but in the New Testament we are ordered to leave even the earth itself and our temporal goods.

THEOPHYL. Further, the seven loaves are spiritual discourses, for seven is the number which points out the Holy Ghost, who perfects all things; for our life is perfected in the number of seven days.

PSEUDO-JEROME; Or else, the seven loaves are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fragments of the loaves and the mystical understanding of the first week.

BEDE; For our Lord's breaking the bread means the opening of mysteries; His giving of thanks shows how great a joy He feels in the salvation of the human race; His giving the loaves to His disciples that they might set them before the people, signifies that He assigns the spiritual gifts of knowledge to the Apostles, and that it was His will that by their ministry the food of life should be distributed to the Church.

PSEUDO-JEROME. The small fishes blessed are the books of the New Testament, for our Lord when risen asks for a piece of broiled fish; or else in these little fishes, we receive the saints, seeing that in the Scriptures of the New Testament are contained the faith, life, and, sufferings of them who, snatched away from the troubled waves of this world, have given us by their example spiritual refreshment.

BEDE; Again, what was over and above, after the multitude was refreshed, the Apostles take up, because the higher precepts of perfection, to which the multitude cannot attain, belong to those whose life transcends that of the generality of the people of God; nevertheless, the multitude is said to have been

satisfied, because though they cannot leave all that they possess, nor come up to that which is spoken of virgins, yet by listening to the commands of the law of God, they attain to everlasting life.

PSEUDO-JEROME; Again, the seven baskets are the Seven Churches. By the four thousand is meant the year of the new dispensation, with its four seasons. Fitly also are there four thousand, that in the number itself it might be taught us that they were filled with the food of the Gospel.

THEOPHYL. Or there are four thousand, that is, men perfect in the four virtues; and for this reason, as being more advanced, they ate more, and left fewer fragments. For in this miracle, seven baskets full remain, but in the miracle of the five loaves, twelve, for there were five thousand men, which means men enslaved to the five senses, and for this reason they could not eat, but were satisfied with little, and many remains of the fragments were over and above.

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