

Midweek Lenten Vespers 5
St. John 6:36-51
March 29th, 2017
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

I Will Raise Him Up at the Last Day

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here in the week of Laetare, the week of rejoicing, the week where we relax our fasting and penitential pondering just a little bit to focus on the Bread of Life—our Lord + Jesus. This began this past Sunday with the Gospel of the Feeding of the 5,000 men plus women and children. In this meal, our Lord + Jesus broke the bread and blessed it and gave it to the people to eat. Five loaves—symbolic of the five books of Moses and represent the teachings and prophecies of the Old Testament—become twelve basketfuls—symbolic of the twelve apostles and represent the fulfilled teachings and prophecies in the New Testament.

In other words, the feeding of the 5,000 is about the Old Testament Christ being revealed in the New Testament Lord + Jesus through the giving of His Body and Blood to eat and drink. This is symbolized in the two fish, which represent the two natures of our Lord + Jesus Christ, his divine and human natures. In the feeding of the 5,000 the people symbolically eat the bread and flesh of Christ. The sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John is about the Lord's Supper, it is about the meal, which we eat and drink every Lord's Day. And that is the focus of the week of Laetare—the Living Bread from Heaven coming down to us to give us His Body and Blood for us Christians to eat and drink in bread and wine. This is upon what our “rejoicing” this week is to be centered. This is the feast we observe to relax our fasting. This is the week in the Church's year where we sing a whole lot of hymns about the Lord's Supper, so that our eyes and our hearts and our ears can rejoice upon the proper thing—the Lord's Body and Blood given to us.

And this is the appropriate week to rejoice in our Lord's Body and Blood, for this is the halfway point of Lent. In a few days, we will enter into what is known as Passiontide, this is when the observance of Lent becomes even more austere. During Passiontide, the Gloria Patri is omitted from the Church's liturgy until Easter. The crucifix is also covered with a violet veil to show that the glory of Christ has been diminished. After this week, Lent becomes more focused. Our fasting becomes more focused, our penitence becomes more focused, and our attention to the cross of our Lord + Jesus becomes more focused. But for now, we are in the week of Laetare, the week of rejoicing, and our rejoicing centers on the Lord's Supper—Christ's Body and Blood given and shed for our forgiveness.

This is why we have this week readings from the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. And tonight, our Gospel is a continuation of Sunday's Gospel from the beginning of the chapter. Tonight, our Lord

+ Jesus tells us that He is the Living Bread come down from Heaven. He is our bread; our Bread of Life.

At the halfway point of Lent we pause our fasting and remember and rejoice upon this holy meal of Christ's Body and Blood. And this meal is a remembrance meal, it is a memorial to what our Lord accomplished for us on the tree of the holy cross.

There is such a thing as a memorial, or even a re-enactment, meal. But that which we do in remembrance of our Lord + Jesus is not that sort of meal. For while we are remembering what happened, namely, the piercing and nailing of His Body and the spilling of His Blood upon the ground, we are not simply remembering. We are proclaiming. We are proclaiming that our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ suffered an unjust and violent death; we are proclaiming that Pontius Pilate executed an innocent Man. But we are not mourning. For in that terrible and frightful event, God spends all His wrath. His need for Justice—to set things right—was satisfied. His Law has been perfectly kept and fulfilled; our punishment is paid in full. In the Lord's Supper, we proclaim that our Lord's Death is good and blessed and that by it we have been saved—rescued and redeemed from sin, death and the devil.

When we commune, we proclaim that that event is not just a past event. It is here and now event for us poor, miserable sinners. For what happened then—our Lord winning forgiveness, life and salvation by His death—happens now to us, in the eating and the drinking; in the remembering and proclaiming. And it happens now because this Bread we break and eat, and the Cup we bless and drink, is not a symbol of what He gave, but is exactly what He gave upon the Cross: His Body and Blood—His life. We eat and drink the flesh and blood of our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord in, with and under the bread and wine!

The Holy Communion is the abiding presence with us of that once-for-all Sacrifice. It is food for our life; our eternal life. It bestows forgiveness. It joins the believer to the Believed One. It delivers not mere morsels, or crumbs from Heaven, but the children's Bread. It is strength for the journey, encouragement for the battle, a promise of the future. Here, the Living Lord makes a pledge of glory to come and provides a foretaste of the Feast to be. Here beneath these signs are hidden priceless things that to our senses are forbidden; signs, not things, are all we see: wine is poured and bread is broken, yet in either wondrous token Christ entire we know to be.

It works its good by a physical mode—by bread and wine. It is not the same to think about Christ's death as it is to receive the One Who died and rose again. What was done to Him was done in His Body, physically. And so it is that the benefits of what was done to Him are given to us in the body, physically through our eating and drinking. Sin and death and Hell are not simply spiritual problems, but physical problems. They are whole person problems and they need a physical, whole person solution.

Our Lord did not just make us better from far away, but He became Man, took upon Himself our flesh, and He is still, in His glory, in His exaltation, Man. The One Who ate broiled fish and whose wounds were felt by St. Thomas, still has a Body, still has Blood. And that, by grace, for mercy's sake, is what He gives to us and by it we are cleansed, purged of our sins, delivered from the iniquities and shame of our petty, selfish lives. Very Bread, Good Shepherd, tend us, Jesu, of Thy love befriend us, Thou refresh us, Thou defend us, Thine eternal goodness send us In the Land of Life to see. Thou Who all things canst and knowest, Who on Earth such Food bestowest, Grant us with Thy saints, though lowest, Where the heav'nly Feast Thou showest, Fellow heirs and guests to be. Amen.

Eat this Bread, drink this Cup, believe in Jesus. He will raise you up from the dead on the Last Day and you will live forever in Heaven with Him and all the saints who have gone before us. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.