

Sermon: 7th Sunday after Trinity 7 August 2011

From the Epistle: I am speaking in human terms because your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity, and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. [Romans 6.19; ESV]

From the Holy Gospel: And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about 4000 people. And He sent them away. [St. Mark 8.8-9a; RSV]

This Sunday, the appointed Word of God for your assurance and instruction is the miracle of the “Feeding of the 4000.”

Christians often ask why it is that Jesus does two miraculous feedings of large groups of people, one of 5000 thousand men plus women and children, making the entire event a feeding of perhaps 12000 all together, and the other, the one you hear in today’s Holy Gospel, a feeding of 4000 people. Some careless students of the Word suggest that there was only one such feeding, and that they authors of the Holy Gospels differ in their report. But, that just doesn’t fly, because both St. Matthew and St. Mark record both miraculous feedings, and both go on to quote our Lord as He reminds His apostles-in-training of meaning of both events!

There were two miraculous feedings, and today you hear again of the second of those feedings, the feeding of the 4000. But, what’s the point?

I.

There are at least two points. First, in the feeding of the 5000, the crowd is largely Jewish, from Galilee for an afternoon together with Jesus. In the subsequent feeding of the 4000, Jesus has left the territory of Galilee and entered Gentile territory, first going to Tyre and Sidon on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Then, He traveled through the country to the north of the Sea of Galilee and then south on the east side of Galilee in a Gentile region called “The Decapolis.” Thus, the 4000 were largely Gentiles, and they had been with him for half a week, as opposed to the Jewish crowd at the feeding of the 5000, who were with Him for an afternoon.

Second, In the first feeding, the left overs filled 12 small traveling bags, one for each of the 12 to carry with him, as a reminder. In

this second feeding, the left overs were enough to fill seven large baskets. Twelve is the Hebrew number of the people of God, represented in the 12 tribes of Old Testament Israel and in the 12 Apostles, the foundation of New Testament Israel.

Meanwhile, The number seven is the number of completeness, of totality. In the first miracle, Jesus shows compassion upon the lost sheep of Israel, because they are like sheep without a shepherd. In this second miracle, Jesus shows compassion on the world of the Gentiles.

It is not likely that the disciples forget the feeding of the 5000 when Jesus now asks them to give an answer as to the need to feed the 4000. Theirs is a different problem. They don't know how Jesus is going to deal with these Gentiles. And, in this miracle, they find out.

Jesus has compassion not just on the lost sheep of Israel, but upon the entire world of lost sinners.

II.

This brings us to the

Epistle of the Day, in which St. Paul speaks of the living death that is mankind's spiritual condition from the Fall. He calls this condition "slaves to sin." It is a prenatal birth defect that possesses every human being from the moment of conception. We don't like to hear that! Many find ways to try to explain it away – they call the condition of original sin a "tendency," or they call the condition of original sin something removable in this life, or they call the condition of original sin just another reminder that one day will we will physically die. Those are the explanations that exist WITHIN the Church of Christ. Outside the Church, they try to get away from this prenatal birth defect of slavery to sin by denying that there is such a thing as sin, let alone original sin, and every so-called advanced society in the world now denies that anything is human at the point of conception by allowing the practice of abortion. No matter, the excuse! No matter, the explanation! The truth

remains shown to you that every human being is a human being from the point of conception precisely because the point of conception is the beginning of personal sin and guilt. “Behold,” David declares by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in Psalm 51, “I was brought forth in iniquity – that is born in guilty – and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Thus, “slave to sin” is the original and ongoing status of every person, and it is because of this original slavery to sin that every person is a sinner. Your sins don’t make you a sinner. Your birth as a human makes you a sinner. Your sins just demonstrate this fact, this reality. This slavery only makes everything worse! This slavery leads only to more and more lawlessness and, ultimately, to eternal death, death without end, a living death, called hell.

But from Christ comes the redemption. “You have been set free from sin,” St. Paul declares. This doesn’t make you no longer a sinner – no, that continues

until your physical death separates you, as a Christian from a sinful nature, forever, so that only your new nature, born of the Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism, lives on forever, to be united with your resurrected body for sinless life with God and His great family, “world without end,” as the older English says it.

“You have been set free from sin.” This is a true, complete, and final fact about you as a Christian. Now that this has happened in your life, Paul continues, admit it! Live it! Dedicate yourself to it! No longer a slave to sin, become a slave to righteousness, or as the term is also translated, a slave to justification!

Today is a day to embrace the truth about you again. Let nothing in your life, in your future, in your church, or in your conversation rob you of living in the Gospel! For you have been set free! “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!”