

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Ninth Sunday after Trinity  
July 29, 2018

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Can you name the only incident in the ministry of Our Lord prior to Palm Sunday which is recorded in all four gospels? It is the Feeding of the Five Thousand. From this fact it is clear the early Church attached special importance to what Our Lord did on that Galilean hillside.

But what Jesus did *not* do was celebrate the first Mass! Many people who do not know or understand Church teaching think otherwise. And the temptation to do so is great. A multiplication of loaves and fishes is *not* what happened at the Last Supper. Bread and wine are not multiplied in the Mass. In the sacristy I place thirty or so hosts in the ciborium for consecration. And when you make your communion there are still thirty or so Hosts, now become the Body of Christ. In Galilee, when Our Lord Jesus multiplied bread and fish they remained bread and fish, but now in a greater quantity. At Mass bread and wine continue to have the chemical properties of bread and wine but because of the Lord's provision become His Body and Blood. So whatever Jesus did on the Galilean hillside, it wasn't the Mass.

So what then was going on in this Feeding of the Five Thousand? It is indeed a wonderful scene, with the Lord in magisterial command and the apostles assisting in the distribution of food, with the great multitude sitting on the grass. This is a prophetic picture of the Christian assembly. There is no doubt the early Church picked up on the Eucharistic overtones: the fish and loaves and breadbaskets made of wicker all appear in the early art work in the catacombs in Rome. They are classic symbols of Jesus "The Bread of the World in Mercy Given." In Galilee the Lord and His disciples were confronting a great mass of human need. These people were hungry. And today Jesus and His Church still confront human need. The Gospel proclaims right down to our own age to one and to all that the needs of the world are never too great for our resources *if it is the Lord Himself Who directs their use*. The men sitting on the Galilean hillside did not know they were beneficiaries of a miracle. What they *did* know was that Jesus could provide for them what they needed. And it wasn't the Bread of Life they received. The Lord was preparing them for one day soon. This same Man, Who had demonstrated His resources were more than equal to the needs of the whole world, would serve notice for all time that "I Myself am the Bread of Life."

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You and I are provided with that which these Galilean people did not yet have: God gives Himself to us in our Communions. And with this gift of Him comes the ability to give to others. In the Mass the bread is consecrated, broken, and given. Jesus was consecrated, broken, and given. *The Sacrament is Jesus*. It is no picnic dinner on a pleasant grassy hillside. It is the nourishment of Our Lord's Own Life to strengthen us in our lives, in our dry places, as we climb steep hills, and must endure and overcome great disappointment or bitterness. And when we receive the Blessed Sacrament we feed upon Him Who gives so that we may have the grace of giving.