

John 6:1–15
Laetare (Lent IV)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 19, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today is Laetare Sunday, which is the Latin word for “rejoice,” the first word of our introit: “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast.” Laetare means: “Rejoice!” In the midst of the penitential season of Lent, the Church cannot help but rejoice at the coming of Easter. The days are growing brighter and brighter, the trees are beginning to bud, and so many flowers are already in bloom. Nature can’t contain itself. Creation is shouting out that the Resurrection is coming and that our Lord is right around the corner. The LORD who sustains us and provides for our every need, beyond what we could ever imagine, gives us new life, both physically and spiritually. Jesus abundantly provides for us, just like He abundantly provided for the crowd by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish to feed over 5,000 people.

The crowd had seen the signs Jesus and His disciples were accomplishing: healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching repentance and the coming of the Kingdom of God. After a period of increased activity, Jesus and His disciples, as usual, had to retreat to a deserted place to pray, rest, and even to eat. The crowds were so needy that Jesus and His disciples hardly had a moment to provide for their own basic needs of food and drink, let alone much-needed time to pray and rest. The people kept coming, and Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The shepherds of Israel, the rulers, were feeding on the sheep rather than feeding the sheep. So as the Lord promised by the Prophet Ezekiel: “I will set up over

them one shepherd, my servant David, and He shall feed them: He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them.”

Jesus’s disciples realized it was getting late, and human sheep still need to eat physical food. The disciples suggested Jesus send the people away to find lodging and provisions. Jesus already knew what He was going to do, the sign He would perform pointing to His divine power to provide for His people. So Jesus tested Philip, who was from that area, by saying: “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” Jesus knew the miracle He would work, but He wanted to test the disciples’ faith to strengthen it. Jesus wants you to see that ultimately all good things come from Him and He is able to provide for you even in what seems like the most desperate of situations. Philip said they couldn’t afford for each person to even have a little. Andrew pointed out the boy with five barley loaves and two fish, which would maybe be enough for Jesus and the Twelve to have a snack.

Jesus then directed the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of fifty and a hundred. He then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed the bread to all those who were seated. Same with the fish. We can’t overlook the fact that Jesus first gave thanks. In Scripture we are commanded to pray, especially because God promises to work through prayer. We pray everyday or multiple times per day in the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread.” God gives daily bread to all people who are alive. That’s how our LORD sustains life, through food, drink, and everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body. God gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, so we’re really praying that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

That's really what separates man from the animals, and believers from unbelievers. Unbelievers don't realize that everything we have, everything that has to do with the support and needs of our bodies, is a gift from the LORD. Most people go about their day to day lives living like animals, living according to instinct and with no conscious thought of the one who is providing them with all things. And so our mealtime prayer begins with Psalm 145: "The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of all living things." It is the LORD who provides everything we need to sustain our bodies and life. That's why we ask the LORD to bless us and the gifts He provides for us, which we receive from His bountiful mercy.

So, too, do we pray after meals, giving thanks to the LORD for His goodness and enduring love, by which He gives food to every creature, including to us. The LORD delights in those who fear Him, in those who put their hope in His unfailing love, and so we thank Him through Jesus Christ our LORD, because it is through Jesus that God gives us all good things. In prayer, we consciously recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and the only appropriate response to a gift is thanksgiving. And so we give thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:19–20).

When all the people had eaten their fill, when they were satisfied with the food Jesus miraculously provided for them, the disciples gathered up what was left. Not only did Jesus use a mere five loaves and two fish to feed well over 5,000 people; there were also leftovers! Our Lord provides abundantly for all your needs, especially when it seems like His provision has run out. Our LORD works through what looks weak and of no significance to the world. He works through humble means, like a boy willing to share five loaves of bread and two fish, to feed a multitude. That's how our LORD works in creation as well. Before the new life of Spring,

everything appears cold and dead. Nature is dormant, waiting for the quickening that comes from her Creator. Every year we see a picture of our Lord's work as creation rises to new life, multiplying and bearing fruit in abundance.

When the crowd experienced Jesus's miraculous feeding, they didn't give thanks to the LORD and bless His holy name, but instead wanted to take Him by force to make Him king. So Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself. The people did not want the LORD and His gifts on His terms; they wanted to take advantage of Jesus and set up a kingdom of this world. Of course, we know how the rest of the story goes. The feeding of the 5,000 happened when "the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." As another Passover drew near, the people actually did take Jesus by force, coming out to capture Him in the Garden of Gethsemane with swords and clubs (Matt 26:55). Jesus would not be their worldly king, so they made a mockery of His Lordship. The soldiers put a scarlet robe on our LORD, crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and put a reed in His hand. They mocked Him, saying: "Hail, King of the Jews! (Matt 27:29). Pilate put an inscription on the cross in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19). The Jews finally had their King, but in a way they never could have imagined: wounded and bleeding on a cross.

Just as Jesus fed the 5,000 at the time of the Passover, so too would He prepare another, greater feast while celebrating the Passover before His crucifixion. On the night He was betrayed, our LORD took the Jewish Passover and transformed it into the celestial banquet we still celebrate today in Holy Communion, where heaven comes to earth. As Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were seated by way of the disciples, so did our LORD take bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take eat, this is my body. And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying,

“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:26ff). Already He was prefiguring the institution of this heavenly meal when He told the crowd of 5,000 at Capernaum whom he had just fed with earthly bread: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the Last Day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in Him” (John 6:53–56).

And so our LORD continues providing for us today, both physically and spiritually. Our heavenly Father gives us our daily bread in the creation He uses to support our bodies and lives. He also gives us our daily bread in the Word of God, as the Prophet Jeremiah prays to the LORD: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). Our daily bread comes in the Word made flesh, who comes to us in His very flesh and blood in the Lord’s Supper, to strengthen and preserve us in body and soul to life everlasting. As Jesus miraculously multiplied the five loaves for over 5,000 people, so has He continued miraculously feeding Christians with His body and blood throughout history and all over the world as He continues to abide with us until the end of the age, when our bodies will be raised from the dead to live eternally with our LORD in the feast that will have no end. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.