

**The Sunday next before Advent**  
*The Collect.*

**S**TIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, **Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?** 6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, 9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? 10 And Jesus said, **Make the men sit down.** Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. 12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, **Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.** 13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. (John 6:4-14)*

What a wonderful Season of the Church Year is Advent. All good things in the lives of men – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Apostles, and us – begins with the Coming of Christ, both spiritually and physically, to us. Having longed to see the fulfillment of God's promises in the Seed of Promise, Abraham hoped in the Gospel of Christ and was blessed to see His Coming. Christ comes to us that we may be enabled to come to Him. We see this truth enacted in today's Gospel sermon text. Those who hunger for Christ will find Him if even on the mountain heights of the Galilean coasts. Those who hunger for Christ will 1) discover (through the Word and Spirit) where He may be found; 2) they will leave the place where that are presently (sin and error) and GO to Him; 3) they will not give thought of what the morrow may bring, but trust in Him to provide their every need; and, 4) they shall be fed with the Bread of Heaven.

*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him* This is most prophetic of that company of souls that will come, over the expanse of centuries and millennia, to Him in faith and trust. They shall come seeking that Bread of Life which will satisfy eternally and not temporarily. They shall, on the day of God's own choosing – and not that of greedy spiritual speculators – come to meet Him in the air, and not a mountain, on His glorious Second Coming. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4:16-17)*

Christ often challenges the faith of His chosen vessels just as He tests that of Philip. Knowing the mind of Philip in His spiritual growth, Jesus asks: **Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?** A lesser prophet than Christ once asked the same question of God in the Wilderness: *Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this*

*people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.* (Num 11:13) It is certain that Christ wants us to know that a greater prophet than Moses stands before us. Without the presence and power of Christ, the world is in constant worry about this matter sustenance. Shall we have bread to eat and raiment to wear? Of course, the world takes the matter a step further: How can we enjoy the most opulent of cuisine and the most fashionable and elegant raiment – delicacies and raiment that will set us apart from the common people and that will exalt us in our pride? The starving child on the backstreets of Calcutta does not wish for delicacies, but only a morsel of bread to appease his gnawing hunger. It is so because the starving child knows not of delicacies or of elegant silken robes, but only his desperate NEED. So the sinner (rich or poor), when he comes face-to-face with his depravity, can recognize no righteousness at all in his feeble works, but starves for the Redemption made available in Christ. Rather than the bread of wheat, he starves for the Bread of Heaven. This Bread cannot be bought with money, so Christ gives Philip a thought to nourish his soul.

Philip's mind has not progressed to that perfection of understanding, as yet, that might be expected from so close a disciple! Clearly, under the terms of the world, a small fortune would be required to buy sufficient bread to feed so many. There were many more than five thousand present for there were five thousand men alone, plus women and children. Has Philip forgotten that He who provides food and lodging for the sparrows of the field is in his presence? *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.* Two hundred pennyworth of bread would cost two hundred days of wages - ***And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard*** (Matt 20:2) And even at such an expense, there would certainly be no leftovers for each would only "***take a little.***" All of our labors and wages from our birth until now will not purchase a single morsel of that Bread from Heaven. The combined wealth of the world would not do so. It is a gift of pure Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was one disciple among the lot who accepted that there was a mystery in the Person of Christ that enabled Him to provide plenty from little of nothing. He knew not the manner in which might do it, but he nonetheless believed that the mystery would be realized even in a meager amount. God takes our talents and multiplies them when we are willing to share them. *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?* What are five barley loaves among a multitude so great, yet, Andrew suspected that Christ would use even a small amount to supply a great need – and He did! Now, we must recognize the innocence of youth in this circumstance. The little lad had labored to bring his two fishes and five loaves over a great distance and even up the slopes of the mountain. Were he a mature man of wisdom, he probably would have refused to share so little claiming that it would not suffice so many hungers and, moreover, he had the foresight to bring them for himself and it would be consumed by him. But the little child has a heart that is closer to the Kingdom of Heaven and has not grown calloused by the world. The child willingly shared his small treat with the Lord. Though we have little, if we share what we have, the Lord will multiply the gift an hundredfold, or more!

*And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.* The rubrics of the Prayer Book indicate when we are to kneel, stand, or sit, and we must comply with each and every rubric of the Prayer Book if we are able. The Lord expects all things to be done in good order and, here, He is about to feed the multitudes with His Bread. The Bread of the Prayer Book is the Sermon delivered from the Lectionary appointed for the day. So the people sit to hear the Word preached. It is the means by which faith is received and increased.

*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:17) Contrary to the Romanist approach, preaching takes precedence over every other act of worship including Communion for, without the Word, Communion is meaningless. So Christ asks that the men be seated to receive His blessing of Bread. When men receive from the Lord, they do not stand in their own power as if they contribute to His miracle. "Stop your labors, have a seat, and see the works of the Lord!"

The Lord will always comfort our needs in green pastures - *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* (Psalms 23:2) *Now there was much grass in the place* (vv 10), *So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.* Obedience before the Lord comes most surely when men realize their need. These men were hungry and were expectant that Jesus could, indeed, feed them. They obeyed Him.

*And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks* Here, Jesus gives us the perfect example to follow in returning thanks for the blessings of Heaven. He never failed to thank His Father in Heaven for every blessing of food and drink. Do we do so, Friends? "...*he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*" Please observe a stark lesson here for us. We do not serve ourselves at the Communion Rail, but kneel reverently (according to the Prayer Book form of worship – and the Holy Bible) to be served the Cup and the Bread. We do not innovate and do according to what seems right in our own eyes, but serve according to the good order required. The Lord allows His servants to have a hand in assisting in His important work. They serve the bread, but the Bread is given by Christ – it is not their own. We, as ministers, preach the Word, but the Word is His and not OURS! Note also, that each person on the grassy slopes received as much as they wanted of the bread and fish. The cupboard of the Lord has no bottom of blessings. There will always be more than enough to satisfy our hunger. We must return to the Bread Table daily for our "*Daily Bread.*"

*When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.* Notice that all were **FILLED!** You never come to the Lord hungry and go away hungry. He fills you with the desperate need of your heart. Another important lesson in this verse is the one of stewardship. We are to be good a faithful stewards in the economy of resources with which God has blessed us. We are to use His blessings of talents we receive in satisfying the hunger of those God has placed in our hands (parents included) but we are **to waste nothing!** When we travel field and forest to gather souls for Christ, our efforts do not end at the early confession of faith – we must continue to teach and nourish the soul in the Word so that the convert will grow strong spiritual bones and muscles. We must not lose a single flower from the bouquet....*that nothing be lost!*

*Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.* Let us count the balance sheet of the Lord here: there were a mere five loaves at the start. Now the remnants taken up fill **TWELVE BASKETS!** Do you believe this is too amazing? Do you believe that the Creation of the stars in the expanse of space too amazing, or the earth with all of its wondrous beauty too amazing, or billions of people – all with different faces and features – amazing? What is so amazing that the Word which created all that has been created could multiply a few morsels of bread into such an immense supply? He is able to likewise multiply the smallest mite of the widow's heart when given out of her need to Christ! He is able to multiply that love scattered abroad from that heart brimming over with the love of God so that the residue is always of plenty.

What is the result of receiving the blessed Bread of Heaven? How should our hearts respond to so mighty a miracle as salvation, forgiveness, grace, and faith? *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.* Faith is confirmed from pillar to post when we have tasted the Bread of Heaven. The multitude recognized that Christ was a prophet of even greater miraculous power and virtue than Moses – their greatest prophet beforehand. *The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken* (Deut 18:15) Christ is, indeed, that Prophet! *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men..... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth* (John 1:1-4,14) Friend, **believest thou this?**

AMEN