

²⁵ So mortals ate the bread of angels; *
he sent them food in plenty.

Psalm 78.23-25 CW

Related topics

Eucharist; Social Justice; Responsibility to the Poor; World Hunger; Poverty; Works of Mercy; Conversion; Faith; Eschatological Reign of God

Closing Prayer

O God, you open wide your hand,
giving us food in due season.

Out of your never-failing abundance,
satisfy the hungers of body and soul
and lead all peoples of the earth
to the feast of the world to come.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B²

Proper 12

(Sunday between 24 and 30 July inclusive) • Ordinary Time, week 16

Principal Service readings

2 Kings 4.42-44

Multiplication of the loaves

Psalm 145.10-19

Praise of God the king

Ephesians 3.14-21

Paul's prayer for a holy people and in praise of God's glory

John 6.1-21

The miracle of the loaves; Jesus walks on water

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The miracle of the loaves

6 Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.'⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Jesus, ⁹'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' ¹⁰Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.'¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had

² *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for years A, B and C from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. 1997.*

eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' ¹⁵When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus comes to his disciples walking on the water

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

John 6.1-21 NRSV

Comments and Questions

This is the one miracle recorded in all four gospels – see also Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17.

In John's gospel miracles are seen as teaching something about God, not simply an impressive spectacle.

To have sufficient food and drink was to be one of the blessings of the promised land – see Deuteronomy 8:9 and 11:15.

God provided food for the Israelites when they were nomads in the desert – see Exodus 16.

Some people followed Jesus because he fed them, not for any deeper reason. What motives do people have for following Jesus today? Are any of these inadequate?

The scale of the miracle of the loaves has led some commentators to look for other explanations, such as people sharing their own 'hidden' food. However, nothing can compare for sheer size with the miracle of God becoming incarnate in Christ.

It was on Jesus' instructions that the disciples rowed back to Capernaum, yet they ran into a storm. Obedience can lead to further difficulties.

Quotations

1

The preaching of the Gospel and its acceptance imply a social revolution whereby the hungry are fed and justice becomes the right of all.

Leo Jozef Cardinal Suenens 1904–1996

2

If you're put on bread and water, it's a punishment. The image conjures up visions of imprisonment and bare survival. In Africa these words mean exactly the opposite; bread and water means freedom – escape from the prison of starvation and death.

TEAR Fund

3

If you give a man a fish, he will eat once.
If you teach a man to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life.
If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed.
If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree.
If you are thinking one hundred years ahead, educate the people.
By sowing seed, you will harvest once.
By planting a tree, you will harvest tenfold.
By educating the people, you will harvest one hundredfold.

Kuan tzu

4

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this bread to set before you,
which earth has given and human hands have made.
It will become for us the bread of life.
Blessed be God for ever.

Prayer at the Preparation of the Table, *Common Worship*¹

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²³ So he commanded the clouds above *
and opened the doors of heaven.

²⁴ He rained down upon them manna to eat *
and gave them the grain of heaven.

¹ See also *Contemporary Doctrine Classics*. 2005. p.193 ('We believe in the Holy Spirit' / Doctrine Commission. 1991. ch.5 para.10.)