

SERMON - FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND - JULY 30, 2017

The event of the Lord multiplying loaves of bread and from a few loaves feeding thousands in the desert is mentioned in every Gospel. In fact, in Mark's Gospel, the story is told twice, once Jesus feeds 5,000 and there are 12 baskets of fragments left over, and later on in Mark Jesus feeds 4,000 in the desert, and there are 7 baskets of fragments left over. On Ancient Faith Radio, (which, by the way, I highly recommend that you listen to, because there are hundreds of podcasts available for our edification and there is much that we can learn), there is a series of podcasts by Fr. Tom Hopko on the "I am's" of Jesus. This is when Jesus calls Himself by various names, such as when the Lord says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Light of the World," "I am the Bridegroom," and so on and so forth. In his podcasts, Fr. Tom explains all of the names of Jesus. This podcast series by Fr. Tom has been transcribed and printed in book form with the title "The Names of Jesus." So you have a choice. You can listen to Fr. Tom explain all of the names of Jesus by listening to him on Ancient Faith Radio, or you can read all of his explanations in book form. Today we are concerned with the name "Bread" for Jesus, when Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life" and the whole significance of bread for us Christians.

This sign, or miracle of the multiplication of bread is extremely important, otherwise it would not be told in each Gospel, and twice in Mark. First we can look at the physical aspect. We need to eat physical bread or food in order to have physical life. The whole issue of hunger itself continues to be a major world issue today. One major thing we are supposed to do as Christians is to try to help the poor and those in need, and part of that is trying to help feed the hungry. Fr. Tom points out that in today's day and age we definitely have the means and the ability to eradicate hunger, yet amazingly starvation and hunger remains a widespread problem. Jesus miraculously feeds the hungry and cures a multitude from their various illnesses, yet Jesus reveals to us that we will always have the sick and the poor and the hungry with us. This will end only when this world ceases to exist. Only in the next world will hunger, illness and suffering disappear. We should know and realize this because we have heard and sung this enough times every time we serve a panikhida or a funeral. The Lord feeds the Israelites in the desert with manna, with quails, with water from a rock, just as in today's Gospel Jesus feeds the five thousand with five loaves. But Jesus makes it very clear that the most important Bread that He offers us is not the physical bread (although, of course, we need this) but the spiritual Bread through which we receive salvation and eternal life. A person can be physically alive but spiritually dead. And what is the spiritual bread that Jesus offers us? Jesus answers this question when he is tempted by the devil and Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to the devil which says that "man does not live by bread (that is to say, physical bread) alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." So, one definition of the spiritual bread is that it is the Word of God. The next spiritual definition of bread is explained to us in the Lord's prayer. In the Lord's prayer we say in English, "Give us this day our daily bread." But that is not a correct translation. In Greek, what Jesus said was ΤΟΝ ΑΠΤΟΝ ΗΜΩΝ ΤΟΝ **ΕΠΙΟΥΣΙΟΝ** ΔΟΣ ΗΜΙΝ ΣΗΜΕΡΟΝ. In Slavonic it is also correctly translated as **насущный** хлеб. In Latin St. Jerome correctly translated it as panem nostrum **supersubstantialem** da nobis hodie. What Jesus said was "give us this day our supersubstantial bread." In the Lord's prayer Jesus is not talking about barley loaves or Freihofer's bread. In John 6:26 Jesus rebukes the crowds when He says, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the father set his seal." So what is the bread that Jesus is talking about in the Lord's prayer? Jesus tells us in John 6:48-54, "'I am the Bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will

live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “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; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” That is why the Lord’s prayer is said right before we receive Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy. That is why we pray, before we recite the Lord’s prayer, “And make us worthy, O master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call on Thee, the heavenly God, as father, and to say:” St. Gregory Palamas warns us, that if we approach Holy Communion “with a bad conscience, without having yet obtained forgiveness by means of confession from him who has received power to loose and remit sins, (i.e., our spiritual Father), and before we have returned to God, or been put on the right path by the prescriptions of the Church, then surely we shall do so to our own condemnation and eternal punishment, driving away God’s mercy and His forbearance towards us.” First we confess our sins and receive forgiveness, then the Eucharist is offered as a sacrifice of Thanksgiving and praise, and by partaking of the Eucharist, we become one spirit with the Lord and receive the gift of eternal life. For just as we are dead as a result of sin, Jesus too was dead on the Cross, but having Risen He lives for evermore, giving life to those who cleave to him through virtue and faith, glorifying them and glorified by them, together with His Father without beginning and the all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.