



More about Today's Scriptures

Proper 13, Year A

Today's readings remind us that God not only gives us bread, but also the nourishment of God's steadfast love. In Genesis, after wrestling with a stranger, Jacob is blessed and his name is changed to Israel. Paul tells the Roman community that no earthly or heavenly power can keep God from loving us. In the gospel, Jesus has compassion on those who hunger and feeds them with five loaves and two fish.

Genesis 32:22-31

Despite an injured hip, Jacob refuses to let the stranger depart without giving him a blessing—one that has been fairly won rather than the one that Jacob tricked out of old, blind Isaac by disguising himself as Esau (see Genesis 27:1-45).

Before blessing him, the stranger also bestows upon Jacob a new name, Israel, revealing that the man of blessing is also the man of struggle who prevails over his foes. Jacob is happy just to have survived this ordeal, because it was a common understanding that to see the face of God meant that one would die. Though limping, Jacob continues on his journey more empowered than before.

Romans 9:1-5

Today's reading forms the introduction to the letter's next major section (chaps. 9–11) in which Paul wrestles with the problem of the unbelief of God's chosen people, the Jews. He expresses the depth of his personal anguish in the desire that he might outdo even Moses' self-offering (Exodus 32:30-32) and "be cut off from Christ" for the sake of his fellow Jews.

But the problem is more than just a personal one for Paul. He has just asserted that the bond of divine love is unbreakable (8:38-39), and he has previously claimed that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation...to the Jew first" (1:16, 2:9-10). But the rejection of the Messiah raises the question of whether God has been, and how God will continue to be, faithful to Israel.

Matthew 14:13-21

In the narrative section (13:53–17:27) leading up to the discourse on the community (chap. 18), Matthew emphasizes the shaping of the disciples into the nucleus of the Church. The unbelief of Jesus' own people (13:54-58) and the prefiguring of his own passion in the martyrdom of John the Baptist (14:1-12) form the setting for the feeding of the five thousand. The provision of abundant food in the wilderness was part of God's mighty acts in the exodus. Such feeding was also expected as part of the messianic age (Isaiah 25:6). Bread is also a symbol of salvation, the life and truth that Jesus brings (15:26; Isaiah 55:2-3). Thus Jesus fulfills the promise of the law and the prophets and gives a foretaste of the eschatological banquet.

The emphasis of the event is not so much upon the miraculous nature of the feeding, for the usual reference to the astonishment of the disciples and crowd (12:23, 14:33) is absent, as it is upon the implied revelation of who Jesus is. For the early Church, the eucharistic significance of the feeding made it a central experience in the narratives of Jesus' ministry. It is the only miracle recorded in all four of the gospels (Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13).



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Reflection

In today's gospel, Jesus feeds thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two small fish. This story is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels, showing its importance to the early Church that produced the New Testament.

Jesus blesses the food by giving thanks. In church we cry out "Amen!" as our liturgy thanks God on behalf of creation, humanity and the Church. In our lives we struggle to relearn the

natural prayer of our childhood, when we woke each morning with wonder and gratitude in our hearts. Time may have dimmed the wonder; sorrow may have stifled the gratitude. Still our vocation as a priestly people is this: to praise God on behalf of all things.

In spirit, we come to Jesus' side in that green and peaceful pasture. We offer what we have. He gives thanks; he breaks it. He shares it among us. We eat and, oh, we are satisfied.