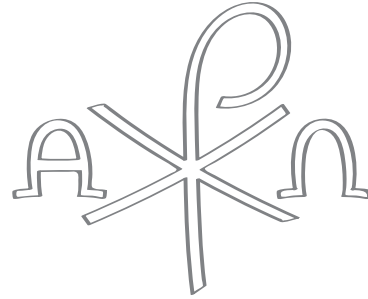


THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Derrick C. Brown



Mark 8:1–9 ESV

Author and Date:

The Evangelist John Mark around AD 50–60. This is the account of the miraculous feeding of the Four Thousand, which took place around AD 32. A parallel account of this miracle is found in Matthew 15 [28–38].

¹ In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, [Jesus] called his disciples to him and said to them, ² “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³ And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.”

- For three days, the crowd had been listening to the teachings of Jesus; three days since they had left what they had been doing and followed after Him. For three days, He has been feeding them the Bread of Life—the very words that proceed from the mouth of God—identifying the lies they had been following, calling them to repent of their sinful dissatisfaction, forgiving them of their sins, and thus delivering them from the lies to the truth that gives real satisfaction and everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- The same Lord from whom Adam and Eve fled, for they had eaten of the forbidden tree, and thus brought a curse upon the earth that causes man, to this day, to labor for daily bread and suffer and die from the very things we eat and put in our bodies; this same Lord, once rejected in the Garden of Eden and who would once again be rejected in another garden—the Garden of Gethsemane—and be put to death on a tree, and become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13); this same Lord has compassion on

those who have been inwardly digesting the spiritual food He had been providing—His preaching and teaching, by feeding them with earthly food as well.

- For when Jesus says He has compassion, He is, in effect, saying: “I share in your sufferings; I share in your burdens. I know them, and I desire to support you through them”, because that is what compassion is: to suffer with, to suffer alongside of. For inasmuch as the crowd had been listening for three days, so too, had Jesus been teaching and preaching for three days. He was in the same boat as them, so to speak. He felt compassion—He felt what they were feeling—and so He is moved to act.

⁴ And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”

- “Here [the disciples] exposed their unbelief to broad daylight, for if they had seen bakers’ and fishmongers’ booths before their eyes, they would have certainly have had assurance. But presently they saw nothing before their eyes, their assurance was gone, and as far as they knew, the people would have to perish forever.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 268).

⁵ And he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.”

- “[Jesus] did not ask as if He did not know it, but that this miracle might be made clear and obvious.” (Ibid.).
- “If God should not act otherwise than according to our thoughts and counsel, he would never be able to accomplish any divine work; yet he still shows himself so friendly that he asks for their advice,

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lets them speak on the subject, has patience with them, and permits them to go on, so that at last they see their folly themselves, and feel ashamed of their unbelief, when they experience and behold with their own eyes his wondrous works.” (Martin Luther, *Explanatory Notes on the Gospels*, 93).

6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd.

7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them.

- As with those in the wilderness in our Gospel lesson, so too are our needs very great. We are more like the people in this miracle than we may realize. We can be as isolated as they were. Theirs was a physical isolation, while ours is most often spiritual. We may be surrounded by others, yet still be isolated. Sin is the wilderness that separates us from God and even, at times, alienates us from each other. We can be surrounded by the goodness of God, both His material and spiritual blessings, and yet have no sense of that goodness. And that is an isolation of the worst kind.
- We can neither meet the needs of the soul nor of the body. It is God who meets them, and feeds both the soul and the body.
- Jesus walks into our wilderness and feeds us with bread—both spiritual and earthly. It is of the utmost importance to keep the order straight. Consider how our Lord has taught us to pray: Before we pray for daily bread, we pray that the kingdom of heaven might come to us, that “by His grace we believe His holy Word and [live a godly life] here in time and there in eternity.” (SC. III: 2). In so teaching us to pray thus, our Lord directs our attention to the order in which we ought to pray. Before we concern ourselves with temporal needs, we should pray for spiritual needs. How often we confuse this order, praying first for our temporal needs *and then, if at all*, praying for spiritual needs!

8 And they ate and were satisfied.

- The crowds’ bellies are satisfied, and they did nothing to merit or deserve it. The daily bread God provides is purely out of His divine goodness and

mercy. So too, is the spiritual food He provides. We are not worthy of the Good News of Christ Jesus, “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25); it is purely out of God’s grace and mercy that He has revealed this wondrous message to us. Just as He continues to satisfy us with “everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes” (SC. III. 4), etc., so also does He continue to satisfy us with spiritual food through the preaching and hearing of His Word, through the regenerative nature of holy Baptism, through Absolution, and through His blessed Sacrament.

And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

- The disciples gathered up the fragments and filled seven large baskets. For you see, men can never contain the bounty of the Lord. His mercy and generosity are far greater than our actual needs, as is His love far greater than our sins.
- 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.**
- “This is the second time our dear Lord Jesus performed this miracle. For on [Laetare] Sunday we heard that he fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fishes, and twelve baskets full remained over. But in this gospel we hear that he fed four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fishes, and seven baskets full remained over. He gives us this miracle twice for our instruction and comfort against the temptation of care for the body and temporal nourishment and support of the church on earth. We see here two kinds of comfort; namely that our dear Lord Christ will nourish both the soul with the word and the body with bread.” (Martin Luther, *Explanatory Notes on the Gospels*, 93).



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