

O Lord and heavenly Father, You have given to us, Your people, the true Bread that comes down from heaven, even Your Son Jesus Christ; Grant that our souls may be so fed by Him who gives life unto the world, that we may abide in Him and He in us, and Your Church be filled with the power of His unending life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 60, adapted.)

So the Jews grumbled about [Jesus], because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me--not that anyone has seen the Father except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

In Christ Jesus the eternal Breadwinner and the very Bread of Life Himself, dear fellow redeemed:

The term "breadwinner" almost seems *passé* in our American culture today. It was used in the past to designate the one in the family whose earnings were the primary source of support for all household dependents. But this burden is usually shared by father and mother in American households today. Sadly it was a designation that was all too often misused to assert supreme importance in the home, in that the breadwinner's vocation was considered the truly valuable one in the home. The stay-at-home parent did not bring home a paycheck. But it could be argued that staying at home raising children, cooking meals and keeping the home clean was of greater value than the measly 40 hour/week paycheck that bought the bread!

However, no matter how greatly we have and still do esteem the so-call breadwinners in this life, we have this blessed truth to consider today: **Only One Breadwinner Offers Himself to Be Eaten for Eternal Life.**

Jesus is the true and holy Breadwinner who earned with His holy life and expended the payment of His holy precious blood to provide the Bread, which gives Life. Those with whom Jesus was speaking in our text were part of the 5,000 miraculously fed the day before. They wanted to make Jesus their bread king, the one who could apparently effortlessly supply their physical needs. How valuable would that be on an ongoing basis in this life? – a welfare state requiring no taxes to support it.

But as Scripture says: “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Eating and drinking nourishment for the body is not why Jesus came into our world. The Father sent His Son from heaven to give sinners life. Look what happened to those in Moses’ day. They ate and drank what God provided through Moses but they all died. In truth, these ingrates who followed-up the miraculous feeding from the day before, challenged Jesus’ miraculous sign with that done through Moses. Moses fed the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus only fed them one meal.

As ludicrous as it sounds on the surface, consider also how those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness was a result of the idolatrous unfaithfulness of the Israelites refusing to enter the promised land when God through Moses led them to its borders the first time. Sure it was bread from heaven given to them on a daily basis. But this only was a picture of the true Bread of Life sent from heaven that was still coming and would redeem and give them eternal life.

We too can show such unfaithful ingratitude in our lives today. We at times grumble against our Lord who provides all good gifts to us. We can even be found wringing our hands in fear and anxiety about our daily bread, ignoring the fact that the same Lord who has provided us the Bread of Life, will also provide our promised daily bread. He is faithful to both of those promises. But in our sin we too can be consumed with worry and fret in regard to our physical needs and even devalue and neglect the Bread we are so freely offered for eternal life.

II

So what does Jesus mean when He says: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” We might immediately think of the Lord’s Supper, which is certainly included in these words. But it includes the entire means of grace through which the Spirit gives us of Jesus. It

is the Gospel preached to us, announced in the absolution, poured upon us in the waters of holy Baptism too.

Those of you who remember the old hymnal that we used before the early 1990s will remember that the Collect for the Word as found in Rite 2 was worded this way: *“Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them ...”* This is the blessed spiritual eating we believers do in faith. The bread God provided through Moses was a gracious gift to be sure, but the Bread of Life in Word and Sacraments bestows forgiveness of sins. And as you know where there is forgiveness there is eternal life and salvation.

We must admit that based on the anxious times we experience in our lives, we could see ourselves joining that crowd that pursued Jesus after the miraculous feeding. We too must admit that we have responded to our Lord’s graciousness with ingratitude, even making demands upon Him as though we somehow deserve His many and varied gifts. How shameful! But by God’s grace it is the One who is the Breadwinner who supplies Himself as the Bread, which takes away even those deplorable sins of your ingratitude.

Parents, you have experienced the ingratitude of your children, even for the food set before them to nourish their bodies. Not even you, sinners though you be, withhold all future nourishment to those ingrates. You continue to do the work to win the bread and to prepare their bread so that they might live in this life. So much more does our righteous and gracious Father in heaven continue to supply us with the very Bread we need for life eternal even in the face of our ungrateful attitudes and actions.

You remember the ingrates at the foot of the cross who mocked our Lord as He was about winning that Bread of Life for us. What did He say in prayer to the Father who sent Him? “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” What was the work done to win this Bread for them and you – 40 hours a week? No, a lifetime of perfect living under the Law of God in thought, word and deed. What was the price spent to buy this Bread for you – 6% of His income as we American’s in average do, or 45% as Kenyans do? No, He not only laid down His life upon the cross, but died the eternal death for all sinners, suffering our deserved hell, so that we might live.

Do you believe what Jesus declares here: “whoever believes has eternal life”, that is, believe in Him as the only Savior? Do you trust that in Him all your sins were paid for? Do you believe that in Him

you are dressed in His holiness being found acceptable to the Father in heaven? You do and so by that gift of faith you have and still do eat the flesh of God Himself, which gives you life.

The ungrateful crowd turned up their collective nose to what Jesus here teaches and could not stomach what Jesus declared to them. We are told that many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him, which caused Him to ask the twelve: "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter responded: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

My fellow eternal-Bread eaters, you are neither starving nor are you too full. You are here eating again the Bread sent down from heaven and you have life, eternal life for His sake. "*Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.*" Amen.