

Lord God, heavenly Father, by Your Son You fed five thousand men *besides women and children* in the wilderness with five loaves and two fish: We beseech You graciously to abide also with us in the fullness of Your blessing. Preserve us from greed and the cares of this life, that we may seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, and in all things perceive Your fatherly goodness; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, by Veit Dietrich, p. 152*)

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ... And the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.'" And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over till the morning." But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

In Christ Jesus, who never brings us to the wilderness to kill us, but promises always to feed us to the full, dear fellow redeemed:

Jesus describes you as one of His blessed ones in His Beatitudes with these words: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Yes, that describes you my fellow believers in Christ. On the one hand your Lord gives you the desire to be righteous before Him who created you, but that desire is not left unmet, the very Lord who worked in you that wholesome hunger and thirst, provides you to the full with His righteousness.

We are in the midst of Lent. Fasting has often been employed by the Church down through the centuries during this holy season. Even Luther would have us memorize these words: *"Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training."* But it is not required by God. Again, Christians have found it a good device to use in freedom to keep them spiritually alert and attentive. Every time a person feels the desire to eat, he or she can make it into a natural alarm to pray. Feeling our mortality is a good trigger to move us to call upon our Savior God for His assistance for others and even for ourselves. We learn how our Lord used the hunger for His people in the wilderness in our Gospel lesson and now in our text from Exodus. You and I have never a reason to fear that we will go without, rather **Eat to Your Satisfaction the Bread the Lord Provides.**

I

"Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt" – in other words, they likely were saying: only if the angel of death would not only had killed their firstborn like the Egyptians, but all of them in that tenth and final plague which instead led to their deliverance from slavery. They would not be facing hunger now. What crazy talk for people who have so many demonstrations of God's deliverance! But it comes easy for us sinners to be filled with fear, dread and despair.

Have you been standing in those long lines at stores lately, filled not with those who lacked bread for that day? Perhaps you were one of those hoarders yourself. If so, do you not believe that your gracious Lord – *"richly and daily provides you with food ... and all that you need to support this body and life"*? You regularly pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Do you not make this confession: *"God certainly gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to acknowledge this and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving"*?

It was not a minority of Israel complaining, rather we read: "the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness". If you have been in some of those long lines, who were your Moses and Aaron? - The people in front of you in line? The owners and managers of the store? I heard of a local woman chewing out a butcher, exclaiming she had risked her life coming to his store and he had no more chicken!

As we read: "the LORD said to Moses, 'I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel.'" Their complaint while directed at God's spokesmen was really against God. Moses would point out to them when they were told how God would supply them food: "Your

grumbling is not against us but against the Lord." So it is even today when you and I grumble and complain about our lack and unmet needs in this life – we are blaming God, questioning His love for us!

II

But after our gracious Lord heard the grumbling, how did He respond to Moses and Aaron concerning His complaining people? With anger and threats? - not at all. Again hear His gracious words: "Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" When their bellies would become full once again, they would remember that He is the Lord who is for them, not against them. By this, He would add to His long list of merciful deliverances by delivering them again, this time from their present hunger - feeding them quail that night and the mysterious manna in the morning.

Our Gospel lesson for today shows that our Lord provides even when His people are not grumbling and complaining. Jesus observed and asked Philip as they saw the large crowd coming towards Him: "Where are we to buy bread so that these may eat?" This sounds like a direct fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah: "Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. ... says the Lord." They came because their spiritual hunger caused them to want to receive the Bread of Life, Jesus, but their stomachs would soon speak out with physical hunger. Our Lord would provide and it would be more than they even needed as the leftovers demonstrated.

The children of Israel were to collect the manna for what they needed only for that day, but if they retained more it would spoil. Except on Fridays they were to collect enough for two days, so that they could rest from the labor of gathering their allotment of manna for Saturday, the Sabbath Day, and receive the Bread of Life, Christ. "Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.' But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank." Typically there were those who tested God, but as usual it was the sinner who failed the test.

God preserve you from testing Him. Instead trust that He will strengthen you in your faith in all His promises. Eat your daily bread – physical and spiritual, knowing that you are invited to eat to your hearts' satisfaction. But do not look into the future with fear and trembling as though He will leave you deprived of what you need for your body and life and for the life to come.

When you open your mouth to receive the Lord's true body given and true blood shed, do you question that this holy food is

sufficient? Do you think that some of those sins you keep hidden deep within you are not forgiven by Jesus' sacrificial suffering and death? If you do, then you in essence are calling God a liar when He declares to us through His Apostle John: "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from ALL sin" or through His Apostle Paul: [Christ] "gave Himself for us to redeem us from ALL wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own". He forgives even your grumblings against Him and your distrust of His abundant gracious providence.

We have entered upon a season that will likely go beyond Easter. Will we be grumbling and complaining against Donald and Jay, those God ordained to govern us now, His spokesmen, if you will? We may enter upon a forced fast. So when the alarm bell rings deep within your bellies, let the word of our Lord ring out clearly and urge you to *Call upon Him in the day of trouble; He will deliver you, and you will honor Him.*

The Lord provides your Bread today as you see He did for His people in the OT and NT wildernesses. Whether it be over two million for forty years or a gathering of five thousand plus people out in the wilderness after a few days, our gracious Lord knows your every need today and forever and will never hold back from you what you need. Your Lord invites you to eat what He so graciously provides, so that you hunger no more. Eat and live. Amen.