



HOLY COMMUNION:

MANNA

“The Bible isn’t about people trying to discover God, but about God reaching out to find us.” – John Stott

THE LESSON: EXODUS 16

In the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus said to the crowds that followed him:

“It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven... 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... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...”

What was Jesus talking about? This was difficult for the people of that day to understand even though they were very familiar with Moses and the story of the manna in the wilderness that Jesus was referring to.

When we read these words of Jesus today, we come to them with the advantage of knowing all about his death, resurrection and the sacrament of Holy Communion. But in order to better understand the meaning behind these words of Christ and our own act of worship, we have to look back at the Old Testament book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus starts by telling the story of the Israelites being rescued from slavery in Egypt. Remember the first Passover? Their rescue was cause for great rejoicing, but very soon the Israelites found themselves in a new situation that required even greater trust in God: they were lost in the desert. Yet even in the wilderness God was with them, listening to them, providing for them, teaching them, and setting things in place so that coming generations might know how great was his love for them.

As we read through this passage that describes God’s gift of manna in the wilderness, keep in mind that this was what Jesus was referring to when he explained to the crowds that he was the true bread of heaven.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow the rule of prayer that you created for yourself.

(If you didn’t make one, try saying the morning and evening prayers from the “Forms of Prayer to be used in Families”, which begins on page 728 of the BCP. If you don’t have a copy, you can look it up here: <http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer>.)

Set aside a few moments when you pray, to say along with the words of Simon Peter (John 6:68-69):

***“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.”***

(Note: Jesus’ teaching about the true bread of life was hard for people of that day to understand, and scripture tells us that many of his disciples “turned back and no longer walked with him”. But when Jesus asked those who remained if they wanted to leave as well, Simon Peter gave this reply: “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.”)

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(COLLECT FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, BCP PAGE 128)



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EXODUS 16: **BREAD IN THE WILDERNESS**

²The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³and 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.”

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not...

¹²I 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.’”

¹³In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴And 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. ¹⁵When 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. ¹⁶This 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.’” ¹⁷And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸But 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. ¹⁹And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” ²⁰But 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. ²¹Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

²²On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” ²⁴So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it..

²⁷On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” ³⁰So the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³²Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. ³⁵The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.