

## **“Ordinary miracles” (John 6:1-21)**

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

Today for our Gospel reading we had the first 20 verses from the sixth chapter of the gospel according John. During the next few weeks we will be reading through the whole chapter. I would encourage you to read it all. It is very challenging. (John chapter six.)

There will be several themes which will appear in this chapter again and again. One of the most important is the theme about how people misunderstood who Jesus was and why He was here. About this discrepancy between what Jesus Christ brought to us and what people expected from Him.

This discrepancy is one of the things that we all need to meditate upon. We all share in this discrepancy, we all have misunderstandings, in theory or practice, regarding why Jesus came and what He does through His church.

This is what we'll try to discuss today – how do people often perceive Christ, what do they expect from Him, and what does He really give us?

Today we read about one of the best known New Testament events - Jesus feeding five thousand. In fact, John said five thousand men, for it could be that there were as many as twenty thousand people, if women and children were counted.

Jesus had been preaching and teaching and healing as well. People from the surrounding regions were streaming to Him. Now He had crossed the sea of Galilee and walked with His disciples up on the mountain hoping to have some quiet time.

However, even there they were not able to escape the crowds. Here they came again. And Jesus had compassion on them. Again. This time He fed them; in a way that only He could.

Using just five barley loaves of bread and two fish. He gave thanks to the Father and fed all those people, and when they had eaten Jesus' disciples gathered twelve baskets with leftover from five loaves and two fish.

Jesus did it. Just so, and not only once. He did things like this from time to time as we can read in the gospels. Not a big deal for Him. This wasn't His mission. But it was really big a deal for those who had come to Him looking for His help.

Let's get to our topic, - to the discrepancy between why Jesus had come and how people perceived Him. As John wrote, **“a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.”**

They followed Him because they saw the signs. Not because of what Jesus was preaching. Not because of what He was teaching. Not because of what He had come to bring them and us. But because of the signs that He was doing on the sick.

Think for a while about this word 'sign.' John deliberately uses this one, while other authors of the New Testament may use the word 'miracles' instead. What is a sign? A sign is not an end in itself. It is something that points to a reality beyond it.

A sign is here to help you to see, to grasp what it is pointing to. Jesus was doing many signs. They were not intended as the ends in themselves, but to point to some other reality, to something much more important - to the person of Jesus, to His true identity.

However, as John described it so well, people followed Jesus because of tangible benefits. When they experienced Jesus healing them and also feeding them, they concluded that this man must be the same prophet about whom Moses wrote.

What to do, when you have someone who is capable of doing such useful things? Let's make him a king! This is what they wanted to do; to take Jesus by force and to make Him a king. But Jesus withdrew again by Himself. It was not His mission.

It is important for us to understand what went wrong. For this is exactly what so often goes wrong also today. All these crowds who seemingly followed Jesus, they, in fact, didn't follow real Jesus Christ. They didn't even like the real Jesus.

They followed a caricature of Jesus. Imaginary Jesus. They followed this miraculous healer, they followed the guy who could feed thousands, they followed the guys who could do miracles, who could give them what they wanted.

They saw these signs, but they didn't want to see beyond the signs. They were not interested in what Jesus had brought them. They were not even interested to hear much of what Jesus was about to proclaim them. Their attitude towards Jesus was – just give us what we want!

Why did thousands and thousands followed Jesus? Was it because they wanted to be with Him, with the Son of God? Because they were longing for the forgiveness of their sins, for eternal life? No. Some of them were, but not majority.

They simply wanted to receive God's gifts. They were not interested in true God, even if He stood before them, they were interested only in His gifts. This is so widespread an attitude towards god among those who believe in the existence of one. 'Just give me what I want! If you are God, if you could do what I can't, then go ahead, get me what I want!'

To be honest, this was to great extent my own reason looking for God. 'I have a problem, if you are God, solve it! That's your business, isn't it? My business is to know what I want, and your business is to help me to get it.'

We can rephrase it saying that 'I'm a real god, and you are - my helper, I know what I want to happen, and you should make it happen. I will tell you what to do, you just follow my instruction. You, follow me!'

This is why people were searching for Jesus. This is how people so often understand what it means to be a Christian. If you can't do something yourself, you ask for God's help, you simply use Him as means to your desired ends.

If we think about it, isn't this a way how many churches try to attract new members. What do you people want? What do you like? We will do everything to make it happen? We will do everything to satisfy your desires. We are sure we can somehow twist God's arm so that He gives you exactly what you want.

Be it health, or wealth, or acceptance of your demands, or of your sins, or anything else that people are dreaming about. It is true, that all good things in this world are

God's gifts, they are His blessings. We should appreciate them, give thanks for them and learn how to use them serving our neighbors. But they are not the reason why Jesus came and why He still comes to us.

Just imagine, if every person who comes through these doors would be healed... Or would receive a free lunch, to eat as much as they want, or were given a 100 dollars – can you imagine how many we would have here every service?

This is not what Jesus came to give us. Of course, even today He has a compassion on us and graciously cares for all our needs. Sometimes in miraculous ways. But what He had brought to those people, and what He brings you today is something infinitely greater.

Something infinitely more precious. He offers everyone, each of you, to each who only desires it, to become a member of His family. He offers everyone to make them children of God. He offers everyone the forgiveness of all their sins.

It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter that you are not worthy of His gifts. It doesn't matter that you have come with your own little demand to get your problem fixed, or your desire satisfied. Jesus Christ offers you all that He has.

You may ask for a fish, but He offers you the Kingdom of God. He does it not because of what you are, but because of what He is. Loving and gracious God, abundant in grace and slow in anger. He offers to you and to everyone eternal life in His presence, full of heavenly joy and peace, without sin, sorrow and pain.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to bring these the most precious gifts to humanity, to every single person. This is what Jesus still comes to give you today, through His Church, in His Divine Service.

He offers these gifts to everyone who desires them. Do you see what He offers, what He gives to you? Can you see that in this very place and in this very time something incomprehensibly great and mysterious is taking place?

Yes, we are in this ordinary building. As are millions and millions of people on this very day. Doing some kind of rituals. Talking about this very old book, the Bible. Saying phrases from the Bible. Singing. Praying. Receiving bread and wine.

What do you see? Do you have eyes of the Holy Spirit? Can you see not with your eyes, but listening what God Himself tells you about this gathering? Can you see more than those crowds who followed Jesus? Can you see beyond the visible the true reality of God's presence here among us today?

Can you see that we worship God in the beauty of holiness? Can you see that the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, Christ's holy presence and His blessings are given to you right now? Abundantly. That right now the Holy God is present with you?

What you experience here is so simple, so ordinary. Not impressive at all, not even exciting, or interesting. Very simple things. Very ordinary things. Simple words.

“I forgive you all your sins, and they are forgiven in heaven.” “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” “Take and eat, the body of Christ, given for you. Take and drink the blood of Christ, shed for the forgiveness of all your sins.” “The Lord bless you and keep you!” Simple things... ordinary things... simple words.

What happens here is not what the world wants. There is no splendour, no entertainment, not fun, not even a free lunch. But this is exactly what everyone needs so much, even as they don't know it. Jesus Christ and His presence among us in this ordinary way. Word and Sacraments.

This is exactly why Jesus came – to help us to think less about what I want, what I like, what I would prefer, what you should do to please me... but to help to listen to what true God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

He changes your heart. He gives your true freedom. Freedom to stop focusing on yourself. Freedom to fix your eyes on Christ. He is your Creator, He is your Redeemer, He knows your deepest needs. He loves you more than you can imagine, He can and He will give you what you truly need – Himself as your God.

At the end of this chapter 6 Jesus speaks against this discrepancy of people's expectations and the reason why He came. When He finishes, most of people leave, for His words are too heavy. It is not what they wanted.

Only few remained. Only those to whom the Spirit had given eyes to see. As Peter the apostle said: “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.”

If you have come here to satisfy your own spiritual needs and wants, to get something for yourself, to boost your self-esteem, or something along these lines... you won't find much. Christ is not here to please our whims.

But if you come searching for the truth, thirsty for God's presence, praying for His Spirit to give you true freedom, hungering for the forgiveness and good conscience, longing to receive what the true God has prepared for you through His Son Jesus – then this is a place to be.

This is where true God comes to meet you, to be with you and to bless you. Each of you. To give you something so great that you can't even comprehend it.

Don't look for what you want, look for Jesus Christ and for His the most precious gifts, and you will receive them abundantly. Exactly what you need the most.

Amen.