

Luke: 9:10–17

From Catena Aurea:

10. And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

11. And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

12. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.

13. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

14. For they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company.

15. And they did so, and made them all sit down.

16. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.

17. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. 1. 2. c. 45.) Matthew and Mark, taking occasion from what had occurred above, relate here how John was slain by Herod. But Luke, who had long before given an account of John's sufferings, after mentioning that perplexity of Herod's, as to who our Lord was, immediately adds, And the apostles when they were returned told him all that they had done.

ISIDORE OF PELEUSIUM. (l. I. ep. 233.) Our Lord because He hates the men of blood, and those that dwell with them, as long as they depart not from their crimes, after the murder of the Baptist left the murderers

and departed; as it follows, And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 49. in Matt.) Now He did not depart before, but after it was told Him what had happened, manifesting in each particular the reality of His incarnation.

THEOPHYLACT. But our Lord went into a desert place because He was about to perform the miracle of the loaves of bread, that no one should say that the bread was brought from the neighbouring cities.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) Or He went into a desert place that no one might follow Him. But the people did not retire, but accompanied Him, as it follows, And the people when they knew it, followed him.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Some indeed asking to be delivered from evil spirits, but others desiring of Him the removal of their diseases; those also who were delighted with His teaching attended Him diligently.

THEOPHYLACT. That you may learn that the wisdom which is in us is distributed into word and work, and that it becomes us to speak of what has been done, and to do what we speak of. But when the day was wearing away, the disciples now beginning to have a care of others take compassion on the multitude.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For, as has been said, they sought to be healed of different diseases, and because the disciples saw that what they sought might be accomplished by His simple assent, they say, Send them away, that they be no more distressed. But mark the overflowing kindness of Him who is asked. He not only grants those things which the disciples seek, but to those who follow Him, He supplies the bounty of a munificent hand, commanding food to be set before them; as it follows, But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat.

THEOPHYLACT. Now He said not this as ignorant of their answer, but wishing to induce them to tell Him how much bread they had, that so a great miracle might be manifested through their confession, when the quantity of bread was made known.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But this was a command which the disciples were unable to comply with, since they had with them but five loaves and two fishes. As it follows, And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we go and buy meat for all this people.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. l. ii. c. 46.) In these words indeed Luke has strung together in one sentence the answer of Philip, saying, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, but that every one may have a little, (John 6:9.) and the answer of Andrew, There is a lad here who has five loaves and two

small fishes, as John relates. For when Luke says, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes, he refers to the answer of Andrew. But that which he added, Except we go and buy food for all the people, seems to belong to Philip's answer, save that he is silent about the two hundred pennyworth, although this may be implied also in the expression of Andrew himself. For when he had said, There is a lad here who has five loaves and two fishes, he added, But what are these among so many? that is to say, unless we go and buy meat for all this people. From which diversity of words, but harmony of things and opinions, it is sufficiently evident that we have this wholesome lesson given us, that we must seek for nothing in words but the meaning of the speaker; and to explain this clearly, ought to be the care of all truthtelling authors whenever they relate any thing concerning man, or angel, or God.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But that the difficulty of the miracle may be still more enhanced, the number of men is stated to have been by no means small. As it follows, And there were about five thousand men, besides women and children, (Mat. 14:21.) as another Evangelist relates.

THEOPHYLACT. Our Lord teaches us, that when we entertain any one, we ought to make him sit down at meat, and partake of every comfort. Hence it follows, And he said to his disciples, &c.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) That Luke says here, that the men were ordered to sit down by fifties, but Mark, by fifties and hundreds, does not matter, seeing that one spoke of a part, the other of the whole. But if one had mentioned only the fifties, and the other only the hundreds, they would seem to be greatly opposed to one another; nor would it be sufficiently distinct which of the two was said. But who will not admit, that one was mentioned by one Evangelist, the other by another, and that if more attentively considered it must be found so. But I have said thus much, because often certain things of this kind exist, which to those who take little heed and judge hastily appear contrary to one another, and yet are not so.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 49. in Matt.) And to make men believe that He came from the Father, Christ when He was about to work the miracle looked up to heaven. As it follows, Then he took the five loaves, &c.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. This also He did purposely for our sakes, that we may learn that at the commencement of a feast when we are going to break bread, we ought to offer thanks for it to God, and to draw forth the heavenly blessing upon it. As it follows, And he blessed, and brake.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) He distributes to them by the hands of His disciples, so honouring them that they might not forget it when the miracle was past. Now He did not create food for the multitude out of what did not exist, that He might stop the mouth of the Manichæans, who say that the creatures

are independent (ἀλλοτριούντων. κτίσιν.) of Him; shewing that He Himself is both the Giver of food, and the same who said, Let the earth bring forth, &c. He makes also the fishes to increase, to signify that He has dominion over the seas, as well as the dry land. But well did He perform a special miracle for the weak, at the same time that He gives also a general blessing in feeding all the strong as well as the weak. And they did all eat, and were filled.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. Catech. Mag. c. 23.) For whom neither the heaven rained manna, nor the earth brought forth corn according to its nature, but from the unspeakable garner of divine power the blessing was poured forth. The bread is supplied in the hands of those who serve, it is even increased through the fulness of those who eat. The sea supplied not their wants with the food of fishes, but He who placed in the sea the race of fishes.

AMBROSE. It is clear that the multitude were filled not by a scanty meal, but by a constant and increasing supply of food. You might see in an incomprehensible manner amid the hands of those who distributed, the particles multiplying which they broke not; the fragments too, untouched by the fingers of the breakers, spontaneously mounting up.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Nor was this all that the miracle came to; but it follows, And there was taken up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets, that this might be a manifest proof that a work of love to our neighbour will claim a rich reward from God.

THEOPHYLACT. And that we might learn the value of hospitality, and how much our own store is increased when we help those that need.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) But He caused not loaves to remain over, but fragments, that He might shew them to be the remnants of the loaves, and these were made to be of that number, that there might be as many baskets as disciples.

AMBROSE. After that she who received the type of the Church was cured of the issue of blood, and that the Apostles were appointed to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God, the nourishment of heavenly grace is imparted. But mark to whom it is imparted. Not to the indolent, not to those in a city, of rank in the synagogue, or in high secular office, but to those who seek Christ in the desert.

AMBROSE. But they who are not proud are themselves received by Christ, and the Word of God speaks with them, not about worldly things, but of the kingdom of God. And if any have ulcers of bodily passions, to these He willingly affords His cure. But every where the order of the mystery is preserved, that first

through the remission of sins the wounds should be healed, but afterwards the nourishment of the heavenly table should plentifully abound.

AMBROSE. Although the multitude is not as yet fed with stronger food. For first, as milk, there are five loaves; secondly, seven; thirdly, the Body of Christ is the stronger food. But if any one fears to seek food, let him leave every thing that belongs to him, and listen to the word of God. But whoever begins to hear the word of God begins to hunger, the Apostles begin to see him hungering. And if they who eat, as yet know not what they eat, Christ knows; He knows that they eat not this world's food, but the food of Christ. For they did not as yet know that the food of a believing people was not to be bought and sold. Christ knew that we are rather to be bought with a ransom, but His banquet to be without price.

AMBROSE. But here the bread which Jesus brake is mystically indeed the word of God, and discourse concerning Christ, which when it is divided is increased. For from these few words, He ministered abundant nourishment to the people. He gave us words like loaves, which while they are tasted by our mouth are doubled.

AMBROSE.; Not without meaning are the fragments which remained over and above what the multitudes had eaten, collected by the disciples, since those things which are divine you may more easily find among the elect than among the people. Blessed is he who can collect those which remain over and above even to the learned. But for what reason did Christ fill twelve baskets, except that He might solve that word concerning the Jewish people, His hands served in the basket? (Ps. 81:6.) that is, the people who before collected mud for the pots, now through the cross of Christ gather up the nourishment of the heavenly life. Nor is this the office of few, but all. For by the twelve baskets, as if of each of the tribes, the foundation of the faith is spread abroad.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

9:12–15 Preparation

Moses' Miracle of Manna.

Cyril of Alexandria: The feeding of the multitudes in the desert by Christ is worthy of all admiration. But it is also profitable in another way. We can plainly see that these new miracles are in harmony with those

of ancient times. They are the acts of one and the same power. He rained manna in the desert upon the Israelites. He gave them bread from heaven. "Man did eat angels' food," according to the words of praise in the Psalms. But look! He has again abundantly supplied food to those who needed food in the desert. He brought it down, as it were, from heaven. Multiplying that small amount of food many times and feeding so large a multitude, so to speak, with nothing, is like that first miracle. Commentary on Luke, Homily 48.

The Five Books of Moses.

Augustine: The five loaves are understood as the five books of Moses. Rightly, they are not wheat but barley loaves because they belong to the Old Testament. You know that barley was created in such a way that one can scarcely get to its kernel. This kernel is clothed with a covering of husk, and this husk is tenacious and adhering, so that it is stripped off with effort. Such is the letter of the Old Testament, clothed with the coverings of carnal mysteries. If one gets to its kernel, it feeds and satisfies. Tractates on the Gospel of John 24.5.

The Mystery of the Loaves Explained.

Ambrose: For we read that first five thousand are fed with five loaves, then four thousand with seven loaves. So let us seek the mystery which the miracle represents. Those five thousand, like the body's five senses, seem to have received from Christ food similar to physical food. But the four thousand are still in the body and in the world that is known to be of four elements.... Seven baskets of fragments remained from the four thousand. This bread of sabbaths is no ordinary bread. It is sanctified bread. It is a bread of rest. Perhaps, if you will first eat the five loaves with the senses, I shall dare also to say you will not eat bread on earth on the third day, after eating the five loaves and the seven. You will eat eight loaves above the earth, like those who are in the heavens. As the seven loaves are loaves of rest, so the eight loaves are the loaves of the resurrection. Therefore those who are fed on the seven loaves will persevere to the third day and, perhaps, attain the whole faith and steadfastness of the future resurrection. Then there is the voice of the saints: "We will go a three days' journey, that we may feast with the Lord our God." Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.79–80.

9:16 The Miracle

Bread is the Word of God that Grows Mystically.

Ambrose: This bread which Jesus breaks is truly the mystical Word of God and a discourse about Christ which is increased while it is distributed. From a few discourses, he ministered abundant nourishment to all peoples. He gave discourses to us like loaves that are doubled when they are poured forth from our mouths. That bread in an incomprehensible fashion is visibly increased when it is broken, when it is distributed, when it is eaten without any understanding of how it is provided.... Truly, Christ's gifts seem small but are very great. They are not bestowed on one person but on peoples, for the food grew in the mouth of those who ate it. This food seemed to be for bodily nourishment but was taken for eternal salvation. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.86, 88.

Christ Has Yet to Feed Them with Stronger Food.

Ambrose: The order of the mystery is preserved everywhere. The first healing is bestowed on wounds through the remission of sins. Then the nourishment of the heavenly table abounds, although this multitude is not yet refreshed with stronger foods, nor do hearts hungry for more solid faith feed on the body and blood of Christ. He says, "I gave you milk to drink, not meat. For you then were not strong, nor are you yet." The five loaves are like milk, but the more solid meat is the body of Christ, and the stronger drink is the blood of the Lord. Not immediately at first do we feast on all foods, nor do we drink all drinks. "First drink this," he says. Thus there is a first, then a second thing that you drink. There is also a first thing that you eat, then a second, and then a third. At first there are five loaves, then there are seven. The third loaf is the true body of Christ. So, then, let us never abandon such a Lord. He agrees to bestow on us nourishment according to the strength of each, lest either too strong a food oppress the weak or too meager a nourishment not satisfy the strong. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.71–72.

Satisfaction from Feeding Miracle Foreshadows the Lord's Body and Blood.

Ambrose: There is also a mystery in that the people who eat are satisfied. The apostles minister to them. The sign is given of hunger satisfied forever because one who has received the food of Christ will never hunger again. The future distribution of the Lord's body and blood is based in the ministry of the apostles. It is already there in the miracle in the way five loaves are multiplied for five thousand people. It is clear

that the people were satisfied not with a little but with an abundance of food. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.84.

9:17 The Meal

Abundance for Lasting Life.

Prudentius:

“Place,” he said, “in these twelve baskets all the fragments that remain.”

Thousands at that feast reclining, with abundance had been fed

On the five loaves they had eaten and two fishes multiplied.

You, our bread, our true refection, never-failing sweetness are.

He can nevermore know hunger, who is at your banquet fed,

Nourishing not our fleshly nature, but imparting lasting life.

Hymns for Every Day 9.58–63.

Abundance of the Miracle Encourages Hospitality to Strangers.

Cyril of Alexandria: But what was the result of the miracle? It was the satisfying of a large multitude with food. There were as many as five thousand men besides women and children, according to what another of the holy Evangelists has added to the narrative. Nor did the miracle end here. There were also gathered twelve baskets of fragments. And what do we infer from this? A plain assurance that hospitality receives a rich recompense from God. The disciples offered five loaves. After a multitude this large had been satisfied, there was gathered for each one of them a basketful of fragments. Let nothing, therefore, prevent willing people from receiving strangers, no matter what there may be likely to blunt the will and readiness of men. Let no one say, “I do not possess suitable means. What I can do is altogether trifling and insufficient for many.” Receive strangers, my beloved. Overcome that reluctance which wins no reward. The Savior will multiply the little you have many times beyond expectation. Although you give but

little, you will receive much. For he that sows blessings shall also reap blessings, according to the blessed Paul's words. Commentary on Luke, Homily 48.

Abundance from the Heavenly Table.

Prudentius:

God has broken five loaves and two fishes and fed the five thousand

With these foods that satisfy to the fullest their hunger.

Then twice six baskets are filled with the fragments that are left over:

Such is the bounty dispensed from the heavenly table forever.

Scenes from Sacred History 37.

Jesus Offers Himself as Bread of Life. Cyril of Alexandria: [Jesus] offers himself as the bread of life to those who believe in him. It is he who came down from heaven and gave life to the world. Commentary on Luke, Homily 48.