

# A Quotidian Miracle

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“Daily” or “Supersubstantial”? Which word best translates the Greek “*epiousios*” in the Our Father? Both are legitimate translations. We are more familiar with “**daily,**” which indicates a basic nourishment. “**Supersubstantial**” points to an extraordinary gift, the precise opposite (it would seem) of daily. Leave it to Benedict XVI to resolve the question by observing that **to live the Christian life daily requires supersubstantial nourishment.**

**Daily and supersubstantial. Quotidian and miraculous.** There’s a similar thing going on in today’s account of the multiplication of loaves and fishes. It’s an extraordinary event, so important that every Gospel writer records it. (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1-15) At the same time, it calls attention to what is ordinary in a Christian life. It’s a supersubstantial miracle that teaches us about daily devotion. Specifically, it’s a Eucharistic miracle that highlights what is normative for Eucharistic devotion.

**First, to depend on Christ.** Although John doesn’t mention it, the other Evangelists tell us that the crowds followed Jesus out to a “deserted place.” **They follow him to a place where they will be in need, a place beyond their own resources and abilities. So also, the Christian. To be nourished by the Eucharist (as opposed to just receiving Communion) requires that we first place ourselves in need of Him, and make ourselves dependent on Him.**

**The Eucharist nourishes us to the extent that we depend on it.**

This means to follow Christ wherever He leads us. When given to the dying, the Eucharist is called *viaticum*, food for the journey. In fact, **it's always and only meant for those on a journey. It doesn't nourish those content to remain in place but only those intent on following Christ, even out to deserted places.**

**Second, to accept His teaching.** In Mark's account last week, we heard that when he saw the crowds, "he taught them at great length." **They received his word first before they received the miraculous bread. They believed before they were nourished, and they were nourished because they believed. The entire scene has the structure of the Mass: first the Liturgy of the Word and then the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And the bridge between them is the Creed, the profession of Faith. Because faith precedes and prepares for Communion.**

**Third, to give Him our insufficiency.** Jesus asks Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat." He doesn't ask because He needs the answer but because we need to reflect on the question. He already intends to perform a miracle. **He asks this question to show that what needs to be done is beyond human power – and at the same time to invite human cooperation.** Andrew comes to the rescue with the heroic boy who surrenders what little he has to the Lord. "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" This exchange captures both the inadequacy of the Apostles' resources and Jesus' desire to use them.

**Every day Jesus asks us to give Him our insufficiency. What He seeks to work within us and for us is beyond our comprehension and power. But He also wants to make us His cooperators in the work of**

**salvation. He desires that we give what little we have so that He can accomplish great things with it.** Imagine if that boy had refused to surrender his five loaves and two fish. If he had looked around, noticed that it was a deserted place and a big crowd, and thought, “I’d better hold on to what I have.” Without that meager contribution, there would be no miracle. Without the giving from our inadequacy, He has nothing to work within our lives.

**At Mass, the Lord invites us to unite our prayers with his sacrifice. Those prayers are as insufficient as the boy’s loaves and fish. But united to Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass, they take on greater power. Our prayers – insufficient in themselves – become superabundant through the hands of the priest.**

Finally, **to guard the grace He gives us.** After He performs this amazing miracle, Jesus says to the Apostles, **“Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted.”** You would think that the One who can work such a miracle wouldn’t be concerned about crumbs. But the command is there, and it is a lesson to us. Because we can be careless and negligent with His gifts of grace.

***Gather the fragments left over.*** Most of us don’t gather the “fragments” of Holy Communion. **We rush out of Mass without another thought to what just happened and what we just received. Thus, we lose much of the grace of Communion. The Host is not a spiritual energy pill that does its work just by our receiving it. The Eucharist is spiritual food that requires spiritual exercise in order for it to increase our health.**

Which means **we should take time to give thanks after Holy Communion.** This isn’t just good manners. **It’s also the way we secure and assimilate the graces given to us. The forgetful communicant doesn’t benefit from the Eucharistic graces extended to him. Only the one who**

**gives thanks** – who gathers the fragments left over – incorporates this gift more and more into his daily life. **That communicant comes to live by the bread that is both daily and supersubstantial.**

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