

The True Bread
March 26, 2006
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

This morning I would like to share a few thoughts with you about the Collect for the Day, which you heard me read earlier in this Service. It's also printed in the Service leaflet. As Collects go it is a fairly new one. It was written in 1952 and replaces the Gregorian Collect previously used for many centuries in other Prayer Books. This one is more appropriate for this Sunday, for it pretty much echoes the Lectionary and reinforces the traditional custom of this Sunday known as ***Refreshment Sunday***, historically a time for relaxation of the usual penitential severity of the season.

It speaks of Jesus being ***the true bread from heaven giving life to the world*** and we pray that we may be ***given this bread that he may live in us and we in him.***

After the ***Feeding of the Five Thousand*** recorded in the Gospel for this day, an event so important in the

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life of Jesus that it is recorded in all four Gospels, Jesus felt threatened by the enthusiasm of the people. *Perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king*, Jesus withdrew and went higher unto the hills alone.

It was within a day or two after this incident of the *Feeding*, longing for some peace and quiet, that Jesus came down from the hills and went to the far side of the lake, but even there he was pursued and the people had demands on him *give us free bread every day....what sign are you going to give us....you must show us more miracles...you must, must, must, give, give, give.*

Jesus had just, days before, fed thousands and they want him to keep it up. He told them that the only reason they want to be with him was just that, not because they believed in him and his message. He told them not to work for the food, which perishes, but for

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the food that endures for eternal life which he will give to them. He tells them it was not Moses who fed them, as they thought, but his *Father who gives them the true bread from heaven*. Perhaps there was a long moment of silence while he decided whether or not he would painstakingly explain his meaning. Then he says with haunting and deceptive simplicity, *I am the bread of life....I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever*. You can read all of this later on in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. This is the scripture and theology, which underlies the Collect for this day.

John the Evangelist is fond of such moments in which Jesus says something on one level, but his listeners hear him on another level. What does it mean for us to speak in this Collect of Christ as the true bread? We know that it means more than literal bread, if only because our Lord's language is constantly communicating on a number of levels. In our quest for

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spiritual meanings, we ought not forget that to a hungry person, God can only come as bread, nor forget that there are places on this planet where the words of Jesus need to be spoken in their most literal sense. If we are using bread as a symbol of justice in the allocation of resources in our world, the availability of bread is a paramount Christian issue.

Even as we speak of our Lord himself being bread for the world, we should ask if this also applies to those of us who claim him as Lord. The life-style each of us chooses, the way we use resources, for example, wastefully and selfishly, or sparingly and responsibly, can either nourish or rob the world we live in. We can become bread for the world, or we can contribute towards its impoverishment.

Then, as we think about bread for the world, we should remember the instructions given to Israel; they could only gather enough manna in the wilderness for

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one day at a time. If they tried to hoard the manna, it would rot. This is why so much spiritual teaching is about dailyness: daily exercise, daily bread, daily quiet time, a daily encounter with our Lord in some way, no matter how simple and ordinary.

In Christian experience, the one moment when all levels of meaning of the word *bread* come together is in the Eucharist. We might wonder if, when the disciples and Jesus were together that last night, if he thought again of the conversation about bread they had on the shore of the lake. It was on that night that Jesus decided for all time to bind himself to them, *and to us*, by the symbol of bread. For three years or so, he had lived among them and now Jesus wanted to live *within them* as well as among them.

He wishes us to realize the same truth. We do not give our Lord the gift of life by accepting and following him. Even our acceptance of him when it happens, is a

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sign of his eternal life *within* us.....nourishing,
leading, attracting and renewing us. He lives in us by
his own loving choice so that we, in turn, are enabled
to live in him. ***AMEN.***