

FEEDING THE 5,000
The Bread of Heaven
ONE LORD, ONE CHURCH

August 7, 2011
8th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

GOSPEL: Matthew 14:14-22
EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Today's Gospel lesson is also recorded in Mark 6:3-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15. A similar event, feeding 4,000, is also recorded in Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 8:1-9. In the West, today's Gospel lesson is commonly used at about this same time of year either from Matthew, Mark or John and is sometimes used additionally for the 4th Sunday in Lent.

Today's Epistle lesson is not used as commonly in the West. When used, it appears for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Matthew 14:14-22	129
Quick Overview: Feeding of 5,000 and 4,000.....	129
Feeding the Five Thousand.....	130
Feeding the Four Thousand	131
The Leaven of the Pharisees	131
The Bread of Heaven	132
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17	134
Background for the Church in Corinth	134
One Lord, One Church	135
The Same Mind and the Same Judgment.....	136
The Issue of Baptism	139

Gospel: Matthew 14:14-22

Quick Overview: Feeding of 5,000 and 4,000

Jesus had just sent the Twelve out two by two to heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead (Matthew 10:5-15, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6). This caused such a stir that large crowds were now following Jesus (Matthew 14:13-14) and King Herod (Antipas) thought that John the Baptist (whom he beheaded) was raised from the dead (Matthew 14:1-2).

From Luke's account (Luke 9:10) Jesus and the Twelve had gone to a deserted place near Bethsaida, perhaps for a debriefing, where He fed the 5,000. Bethsaida was the home of Peter, Andrew and Philip (John 1:44). They went by boat to this deserted place (Matthew 14:13) and embarked from Capernaum, following the Northern coast of the Sea of Galilee such that the crowds could see where they were going (Matthew 14:13, Mark 6:33, John 6:2). Both

Copyright © Mark Kern 2007

Capernaum (Matthew 9:1), Nazareth (Matthew 13:54, Mark 6:1) and Cana (John 4:44) are referred to Jesus' own city (literally His fatherland) and He spent a lot of time there. After feeding the 5,000, they went back toward Capernaum (John 6:17) and were struggling with their oars against a strong headwind (Mark 6:48). On the journey to the deserted place near Bethsaida, they also had a tough time rowing, allowing the crowds to get there first on foot (Matthew 14:13, Mark 6:33).

After a side trip to the regions of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21, Mark 7:31), Jesus came back to the Sea of Galilee, skirting the Western shore (Matthew 15:29) heading south toward Magdala (Matthew 15:39) where Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10) is considered a village near Magdala. It was just North of this at a deserted spot that He taught the crowds for three days, then fed the 4,000 (Matthew 15:32, Mark 8:2) before heading back to Bethsaida (Mark 8:22).

Feeding the Five Thousand

From Mark's and Luke's accounts, the Twelve had just returned (Mark 6:30, Luke 9:11) from being sent out two by two to heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead (Matthew 10:5-23, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-10). While they were out preaching and healing, Herod thought that John the Baptist had risen from the dead since it was John's former disciples (Andrew, John etc.) that were doing such great wonders (Matthew 14:1-12, Mark 6:14-29, Luke 9:7-9). When the Twelve returned, Jesus found out that John had been beheaded (Matthew 15:12-13). Therefore, Jesus took the Twelve to the deserted place near Bethsaida for a debriefing away from the crowds (Mark 6:31, Luke 9:10).

When the crowds followed them, Jesus had compassion on the multitudes because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:34). After spending all day teaching and healing them, it was getting toward evening (Matthew 14:15, Mark 6:35, Luke 9:12). Since the day began at 6:00 p.m. under the Hebrew calendar, this implies that it was late afternoon in our terminology. The Twelve asked Jesus to send the crowds away to get some food and shelter (Matthew 14:15, Mark 6:36, Luke 9:12). From John's account, Philip was tested by Jesus. Jesus asked him, "Where shall we buy bread that all these may eat?" (John 6:5). Philip replied that 200 denarii worth of bread would only give everyone a little.

Andrew then came forward with the offer of a child to share his lunch with everyone: five barley loaves (biscuit size) and two sardines. Andrew commented, "What is this among so many?" (John 6:9). Later accounts indicate that the child was Ignatius of Antioch, the third Bishop of Antioch who was fed to the lions in Rome as an old man in about 107 AD. To teach the Twelve more about provisions, Jesus took Ignatius' offer at face value. He shared his lunch with everyone, thus demonstrating His viewpoint regarding the faith of a child. Earlier, when the Twelve had been sent out two by two, they were similarly instructed not to take any provisions: no bread, no money, no bag (Matthew 10:9-10, Mark 6:8-9, Luke 9:3).

With the people sitting down in ranks of hundreds and fifties for an orderly distribution, Jesus looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and divided the fish. The Twelve (along with the Seventy and the women) then made distribution to everyone. All 5,000 men plus the women and the children ate and were filled. The Twelve then filled 12 baskets (about bushel size) with leftover fragments.

Considering the logistics of this, a hungry man will eat at least ½ pound of food to satisfy his hunger. Thus, Jesus created well over 2,500 pounds of food from the 5 loaves and 2 sardines. Figuring that this was done in less than two hours (it was getting toward evening), Jesus had to have “handled” at least 20 pounds of food per minute.

Feeding the Four Thousand

A short time later, this time somewhere on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sat on a “mountain” and healed a number of people (Matthew 15:29). Since the Western shore rises up to a mountain ridge fairly quickly, any of the foothills may have provided an elevated location from which to address the crowds. Some of those healed were the lame, the blind, the mute, the maimed (or crippled), and many others (Matthew 15:30). The multitudes marveled at this and glorified the God of Israel (Matthew 15:31).

This continued for three days without the crowds having anything to eat. Jesus had compassion on the multitude and didn’t want to send them away hungry from that deserted place so that they didn’t faint from hunger on their way home (Matthew 15:32). The Twelve still hadn’t gotten the message from the feeding of the 5,000 and asked where they could possibly get enough food to feed all these people. They did have seven loaves and a few sardines, however (Matthew 15:33-34).

Again the people were organized to sit down in groups. Again Jesus gave thanks, broke the loaves and divided the sardines and the Twelve distributed it to everyone. All 4,000 men plus the women and children ate and were filled. This time, they picked up seven large baskets of fragments afterward (Matthew 15:35-37). These large baskets were big enough to hold a man; Paul was lowered down through the wall of Damascus in such a large basket (Acts 9:25).

The Leaven of the Pharisees

The reaction of the crowds was so strong that Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king. So He left alone to pray on a mountain (John 6:15).

The Pharisees, however, became very jealous of all the attention Jesus was receiving and asked him for a sign from heaven that He was the promised Messiah (Mark 8:11). Feeding the hungry in the wilderness was just given as a messianic sign fulfilling the prophecy, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Can He give bread also?” (Psalm 78:19-20). But Jesus replied that no sign would be given to this generation except the sign of the Prophet Jonah (Matthew 16:4, Mark 8:12).

After that, Jesus and the Twelve left by boat to return to Bethsaida but the Twelve forgot to bring enough bread and had only one loaf in the boat (Matthew 16:5, Mark 8:14). During the trip, Jesus warned the Twelve to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6, Mark 8:15). The hearts of the Twelve were still hardened and they had not understood about the loaves. They thought Jesus was criticizing them for not bringing enough food (Mark 8:16-17, 6:52). So Jesus went over it again. “When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets were left over?” “Twelve”, they answered. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many large baskets were left over?” “Seven”, they answered (Mark 8:16-20,

Matthew 16:7-11). Then they understood that He was not talking about the leaven of bread but about the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:12).

The Bread of Heaven

Around Passover of 29 AD, a year before the Crucifixion, many people were seeking Jesus. Jesus confronted them! They were seeking Him because they ate of the loaves and were filled at the feeding of the 5000. So He cautioned them to seek the food that endures to everlasting life (John 6:22-27). Using the leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6-12, Luke 12:1), the crowds quoted Exodus 16:4-5, “Behold, I will rain bread (i.e. manna) from heaven for you” and asked Jesus what sign He will perform (John 6:30-31). There is a dual use of the term “leaven” in the Scriptures. Christ in the Church will leaven the whole lump, and all who respond to Him will become holy (Galatians 5:9). On the other hand, sin among the brethren needs to be purged out so that it doesn’t produce a leavening that goes in the other direction (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Jesus replied that it was not Moses who gave the people bread from heaven but His Father. “The Bread of Heaven is He Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). He continued that He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

“I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

The Lord’s Supper is sometimes referred to as the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 10:21), and as the Bread of Heaven (John 6:32-33). The manna that fed Israel for 40 years in the wilderness was also a foreshadowing of the Lord’s Supper. Manna was a mystery food¹, just like the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Moses said of the manna,

And he afflicted you and restricted you with hunger, and fed you with manna, which your fathers knew not; that he might teach you that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God shall man live” (Deuteronomy 8:3 LXX).

As soon as the people had their first crop in the Promised Land, the manna stopped as suddenly as it came (Joshua 5:12).

The Lord’s Table is not magical, but needs to be mixed with faith. In this regard, Jesus spoke of the Lord’s Supper as follows,

“Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My Flesh is true food, and My Blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. As the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the Bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died. He who eats this Bread shall live forever” (John 6:53-58).

These words caused quite a stir, even among Jesus’ disciples. Some of them said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60). In other words, they didn’t agree, but

¹ There is a play-on-words in that statement. “Manna” in Hebrew means “What is it?” (Exodus 16:15) Therefore neither the people nor their fathers knew what it was.

didn't understand either. As a result, many of His disciples withdrew and did not walk with Him anymore (John 6:66). According to tradition², two of these disciples that left were the Evangelists Mark and Luke, but they later returned and wrote their Gospels. The Twelve stayed with Him (John 6:67-69) even though they didn't understand either what He said about the Bread of Heaven (Luke 24:30-35).

As Jesus did at the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000, so He did at the Last Supper. After blessing it, He broke it and gave it to them. At the Last Supper, He added, "Take, eat, this is My body" (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-24). Similarly with the cup, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25-27).

Just as no one knew where Manna came from, so no one knows how the bread and the cup is the body and blood of the Lord. Manna was the Lord's miraculous provision just as it was His miraculous provision that their clothes and their sandals never wore out nor did their feet swell from walking during the 40 years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:4, 29:5). The church has always referred to the Lord's Supper as "O Great Mystery" and has recognized that it is not explainable. The bishops in the Church are referred to as "stewards of God" (Titus 1:7) and "Stewards of the Mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), where the word *steward* (Greek *oikonomos*) refers to a household manager. In the Orthodox Church the Lord's Supper is reserved for those who confess the Orthodox Faith. This is not to be elitist but to elevate the Lord's Supper as the highest form of the unity of the Faith and to look forward to a time when the Church will no longer be divided. Just as the bread and the cup **IS** the body and blood of the Lord (it doesn't just represent the body and blood), so the bread and the cup **IS** the New Covenant. The Church has always considered the Lord's Supper to be the central part of worship as we "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15) around the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 10:21).

Just as manna was God's special provision to get His people through the wilderness (Exodus 16:35, Numbers 11:7), the Lord's Supper is God's special provision for the wilderness of this life. Once we have arrived in the Promised Land at the Second Coming, the manna will not be necessary and we will drink of the fruit of the vine new with our Lord (Matthew 26:29). At that time, everyone will know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34), and everywhere will be holy ground (Joshua 5:15). And we will all join the saints and angels in worshipping the captain of the host of the Lord.

² Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles.

ONE LORD, ONE CHURCH

August 7, 2011
8th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision F

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Today's Epistle lesson goes well with today's Gospel lesson due to the strong connection in the Orthodox Church between the Lord's Supper and the unity of the Faith.

Background for the Church in Corinth

Paul founded the Church in Corinth about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Silas was traveling with Paul at the time along with Luke, Timothy and Andronicus, where all but Paul were of the original Seventy. Luke was left behind to oversee the Macedonian Churches³. Silas was left behind in Corinth⁴ and was later known as the Bishop of Corinth.

Before Paul arrived in Corinth for an extended stay again in late 55 AD, he wrote four letters to Corinth (two of which are lost) and paid the Church one brief visit⁵. In the interval from 52 to 55 AD, Apollos and the Apostle Peter visited Corinth. Apollos was one of the original Seventy, but must have been back home in Alexandria at the time of Pentecost. He knew only the baptism of John in 53 AD when he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, the overseers Paul left in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), straightened Apollos out and also wrote to the Churches in Achaia, (Athens and Corinth) to receive Apollos when he arrived (Acts 18:27). Apollos proceeded to help out by vigorously refuting the Jews publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:28). Paul said that he and Apollos are one (1 Corinthians 3:8); that is, of one mind in the work of establishing the Churches.

The same can be said for the relationship between Paul and Peter. Peter visited Corinth in the early 50's AD. He obviously made a big impression in Corinth since there were factions that had developed by 55 AD (1 Corinthians 1:12) centered around Paul, Apollos, Peter and none of the above (i.e. Christ)!! On Peter's way to Corinth, Paul met him in Macedonia and together they ordained four bishops:

BISHOP	CHURCH
Olympas	Philippi
Jason	Thessalonica
Silas	Corinth
Herodion	Petras (SW Greece)

Copyright © Mark Kern 2007

³ Note switch in tenses from "we" to "they" and back to "we" in Acts 16:16, 17:1, 20:6.

⁴ Note that we never hear from Silas again traveling with Paul after he arrived in Corinth, Acts 18:5ff.

⁵ For more details of this, see the Epistle lesson discussion for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost.

Thus we can definitely say that Peter and Paul were one in the work also.

From a detailed study of Paul's Missionary Journeys, Paul worked with at least 60 of the original members of the Seventy at some point. Many of them like Luke, Timothy, and Titus traveled with him a lot. In addition, Paul had some contact with Peter, John, Andrew and Philip.

One Lord, One Church

Paul had heard what was going on in Corinth from those of the household of Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11) and from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:15-17) who had come to see him in Ephesus, where he was when he wrote this letter. The spiritual climate in Corinth was not good. Besides division (1 Corinthians 1:12) and heresy (1 Corinthians 15:12), sexual immorality involving incest beyond that of the Gentiles was being tolerated (1 Corinthians 5:1-6). Small wonder then that other problems existed.

John Chrysostom noted⁶ that Paul repeatedly compared the Churches to the Gentiles when he needed to reproach them in some way. "For this is the will of God, that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; also Ephesians 4:17; Colossians 3:6-7). To the Corinthians, Paul stated, "There is sexual immorality among you, such as is not even named among the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 5:1). The Gentiles don't even dare to do such things. When they are convicted of inventing such modes of uncleanness that the unbelievers do not even know of, the sin must be exceedingly great, beyond all words.

The Epistle lesson addresses just one of these problems: a divided Church. The Corinthian Church was divided into factions based on the personalities of some evangelists who had been there: Paul, Apollos and Peter. Apollos and Peter hadn't been there long, but both were very gifted speakers (Acts 18:28, Acts 2:14ff). Paul was not as gifted a speaker as Apollos and Peter (2 Corinthians 10:10), but he had a quiet strength and was known for performing many miracles (Acts 19:11-12). Thus, one can see how personality cults could develop around these three men – even though the three men did not seek that.

The antidote to personality cults and the antidote to a divided church, which are two huge problems today, is centered on the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:17-18). Paul speaks of The Word of the Cross and how it is foolishness to those who are perishing but the Power of God to those who are being saved. The Word of the Cross or taking up one's cross to follow Christ is such an important aspect of Orthodoxy that aspects of it are the featured topic on five separate occasions in the Orthodox lectionary:

- The Sunday of All Saints or the First Sunday after Pentecost
- The Sunday Before the Exaltation of the Cross
- The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14-27)
- The Sunday After the Exaltation of the Cross
- The Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross or the Third Sunday of Lent

If everyone were to take up his cross and follow Christ, the fleshly behavior of the Corinthians would be short-circuited and personality cults would not develop.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XV, 1.

The Same Mind and the Same Judgment

Paul wrote that the Corinthians be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). What does this mean? Ignatius of Antioch wrote⁷ to encourage the people to do this and contrasted this unity with the followers of Simon Magus⁸, who presented quite a different flavor.

“For there are some vain talkers (Titus 1:10) and deceivers, not Christians, but Christ-betrayers, bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and ‘corrupting the word’ (2 Corinthians 2:17) of the Gospel. They intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, as if they mingled aconite⁹ with sweet wine, so that he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draft, may incautiously meet with his death. One of the ancients¹⁰ gives us this advice, ‘Let no man be called good who mixes good with evil’. For they speak of Christ, not that they may preach Christ, but that they may reject Christ. And they speak of the Law, not that they may establish the Law, but that they may proclaim things contrary to it. For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the Law from Christ. They also slander His being born of the Virgin; they are ashamed of His Cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power”.

Tertullian noted¹¹ that heresies are sins of the flesh (1 Corinthians 3:4), and that the issue with those that pursue them is that it is their choice. They willingly choose their own condemnation.

“Paul counts ‘heresies’ among ‘the sins of the flesh’ (Galatians 5:20), who also intimates to Titus, that ‘a man who is a heretic’ must be ‘rejected after the first admonition’, on the ground that ‘he is perverted, and commits sin, as a self-condemned man’ (Titus 3:10-11). Indeed, in almost every Epistle, when enjoining on us the duty of avoiding false doctrines, he sharply condemns heresies. Of these the practical effects are false doctrines, called in Greek *heresies*, a word used in the sense of that *choice* which a man makes when he either teaches them to others or takes up with them for himself. For this reason it is that he calls the heretic *self-condemned*, because he has himself chosen that for which he is condemned”.

Cyprian used¹² the examples of Rahab, the Passover and David to illustrate that the Church is one house and that it is not divisible.

“Do you think that you can stand and live if you withdraw from the Church, building for yourself other homes and a different dwelling? It was said to

⁷ Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, VI.

⁸ For details on Simon Magus and his followers, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St. Athanasius Press, 2003.

⁹ From the poisonous monkshood plant, sometimes used as a sedative.

¹⁰ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VI, 13.

¹¹ Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heresies, II, I, 6.

¹² Cyprian, Treatises, I, 8.

Rahab, in whom was prefigured the Church, ‘Your father, and your mother, and your brethren, and all the house of your father shall gather into your house. And it shall come to pass, whoever shall go abroad beyond the door of your house, his blood shall be upon his own head’ (Joshua 2:19). Also, the sacrament of the Passover contains nothing else in the Law of the Exodus than that the lamb which is slain in the figure of Christ should be eaten in one house. God speaks, saying, ‘In one house shall you eat it; you shall not send its flesh abroad from the house’ (Exodus 12:46). The flesh of Christ, and the holy of the Lord, cannot be sent abroad, nor is there any other home to believers but the one Church. In the house of God, in the Church of Christ, men dwell with one mind, and continue in concord and simplicity”.

Athanasius explained¹³ the unity that Paul spoke of. It follows the pattern of the Father and the Son, but is not the same as the unity within the Trinity. Christ’s unity with the Father is an example and image of our unity with the Father through the Son.

The words, ‘that they may be one in Us’ (John 17:11), have a right sense (and a wrong sense). If it were possible for us to become as the Son in the Father, the words ought to read, ‘that they may be one in You’, as the Son is in the Father. But, as it is, He has not said this; but by saying ‘in Us’ He has pointed out the distance and difference. He is alone in the Father, as Only Word and Wisdom; but we in the Son, and through Him in the Father. And thus speaking, He meant, ‘By Our unity may they also be one with each other, as We are one in nature and truth. Otherwise they could not be one, except by learning unity in Us’. And that ‘in Us’ has this signification, we may learn from Paul, who says, ‘These things I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos, that you may learn in us not to be puffed up above what is written’ (1 Corinthians 4:6-7). The words ‘in Us’ then, are not ‘in the Father,’ as the Son is in Him; but imply an example and image. For as Paul to the Corinthians, so is the oneness of the Son and the Father a pattern and lesson to all. From this they may learn, looking to that natural unity of the Father and the Son, how they themselves ought to be one in spirit towards each other. And this mode of speech we may find in the divine writings, as ‘In God will we do great acts’; and ‘In God I shall leap over the walls’ (Psalm 18:29); and ‘In You will we tread down our enemies’ (Psalm 60:12). Therefore it is plain, that in the Name of Father and Son we shall be able, becoming one, to hold firm the bond of love. For the Lord says, ‘And the glory which You gave Me, I have given to them, that they may be one as We are one’ (John 17:22). He signifies not identity, but an image and example.

Vincent of Lerins stated¹⁴ that the Church consists of those who do not depart from the unity of consent, and God is not dissention.

“But if anyone dissent from their unanimous decision, let him listen to the words of the Apostle, ‘God is not the God of dissension but of peace’ (1 Corinthians 14:33). That is, not of him who departs from the unity of consent, but of those who remain steadfast in the peace of consent. ‘As I teach in all Churches of the saints’, that is, of Catholics, which churches are therefore churches of the saints, because they continue steadfast in the communion of the faith”.

¹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxv, 21.

¹⁴ Vincent of Lerins, A Commonitory, XXVIII, 73.

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹⁵ to John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople (patriarch 582-595 AD), regarding John's desire to be called "Universal", or head of the Churches. Gregory stated that this was similar to the schism in Corinth and also similar to Lucifer's desire to exalt his throne above that of the Son of God. So long as Christ was not the head of the Church, the Church had ceased to be His. Pope Gregory criticizes papal supremacy and likens it to Lucifer exalting himself.

"Consider that in this rash presumption the peace of the whole Church is disturbed. This is in contradiction to the grace that is poured out on all in common; in which grace doubtless you yourself will have power to grow so far as you determine with yourself to do so. And you will become by so much the greater as you restrain yourself from usurping a proud and foolish title: and you will advance in proportionately as you are not bent on arrogance by demoting your brethren. Wherefore, dearest brother, with all your heart, love humility, through which the concord of all the brethren and the unity of the holy universal Church may be preserved. Certainly the Apostle Paul, when he heard some say, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, but I of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:13), regarded with the utmost horror such tearing apart of the Lord's body, whereby they were joining themselves to other heads. He exclaimed, 'Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul' (1 Corinthians 1:13)?

"Paul shunned the subjecting of the members of Christ partially to certain heads, beside Christ, though this were to the Apostles themselves. What will you say to Christ, in the scrutiny of the last judgment, having attempted to put all his members under yourself by the appellation of 'Universal'? The only one who imitated this wrongful title was he, who despised the legions of angels, constituted socially with himself, and who attempted to start up to an eminence of singularity, that he might seem to be under none and to be alone above all? Who even said, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of heaven. I will sit on a lofty mountain toward the North. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High' (Isaiah 14:12-14 LXX). For what are all your brethren, the bishops of the universal Church, but stars of heaven, whose life and discourse shine together amid the sins and errors of men, as if amid the shades of night? And when you desire to put yourself above them by this proud title, and to tread down their name in comparison with yours, what else do you say but I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of heaven? Are not all the bishops together clouds, which both rain in the words of preaching, and glitter in the light of good works? And when you despise them, and attempt to press them down under yourself, what else do you say but what is said by the ancient foe, 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds?' All these things I behold with tears, and tremble at the hidden judgments of God".

"My fears are increased, and my heart cannot contain its groans. This most holy man, John, of so great abstinence and humility, has broken out into such a pitch of pride as to attempt, in his coveting of that wrongful name, to be like him who proudly wished to be like God. He lost even the grace of the likeness granted him; and because he sought false glory, thereby forfeited true blessedness".

¹⁵ Gregory the Great, Epistle to John of Constantinople, V, 18.

“Certainly Peter, the first of the Apostles, himself a member of the holy and universal Church, and Paul, Andrew, John, etc. — what were they but heads of particular communities? And yet all were members under one Head. And the saints before the Law, the saints under the Law, the saints under grace, all these making up the Lord’s Body, were constituted as members of the Church, and not one of them has wished himself to be called universal. Now let your Holiness acknowledge to what extent you swell within yourself in desiring to be called by that name by which no one presumed to be called who was truly holy”.

The Issue of Baptism

Paul addressed the division in Corinth by means of baptism. They were not baptized in the name of Paul and Paul was not crucified for them (1 Corinthians 1:13, 15). John Chrysostom comments¹⁶ on this as follows:

“‘Why are you elated at having baptized, when I for my part even give thanks that I have not done so!’ Saying this, by a kind of divine art, he does away with their swelling pride on this point; not with the power inherent in baptism, (God forbid), but with the folly of those who were puffed up at having been baptizers. First, he showed that the Gift is not theirs; and second, by thanking God therefore. For Baptism truly is a great thing; but its greatness is not the work of the person baptizing, but of Him who is invoked in the Baptism. Baptism is nothing as regards man’s labor, and is much less than preaching the Gospel. Again I say, great indeed is Baptism, and without baptism it is impossible to obtain the Kingdom. Still a man of no singular excellence is able to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, there is need of great labor”.

“He states also the reason, why he gives thanks that he had baptized no one, ‘Lest anyone should say that you were baptized into my name’. For if, when insignificant persons and of little worth baptize, a heresy arises, if I baptized many, it was likely that they would have formed a party, would have called themselves by my name, and also would have ascribed the Baptism to me. For if from the inferiors so great an evil arose, from those of higher order it would perhaps have gone on to something far more grievous”.

Chrysostom also contended¹⁷ that the seriousness of the division in Corinth was not just that some members of the body were fleshly but that the One Body had perished. Referring to the word divisions (schisms),

“The emphatic force of the word “schism”, I mean the name itself, was a sufficient accusation. For it was not that they had become many parts, each entire within itself, but rather the One Body, which originally existed, had perished. If they had been entire Churches, there might be many of them; but if they were divisions of the Church, then that first one was gone. For that which is entire within itself, by becoming many by division into many parts, loses even the original state. Such is the nature of divisions”.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, III, 6.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, III, 5.

Leo the Great stated¹⁸ that the reason Paul was not sent to baptize, but to preach, was because Christ was evangelizing the nations with humble people, not with philosophers and orators.

“When Christ was about to summon all nations to the illumination of the Faith, He chose those who were to devote themselves to the preaching of the Gospel not from among philosophers or orators, but took humble fishermen as the instruments by which He would reveal Himself. The heavenly teaching, which of itself is full of mighty power, does not need the aid of words. Therefore the Apostle protests and says, ‘Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel, not in wisdom of words lest the Cross of Christ should be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those that perish, but to those, which are being saved, it is the power of God’”.

Hilary of Poitiers added¹⁹ another reason: Paul was not sent to baptize but to combat the wisdom of this world with the Cross. Paul scorns and ridicules worldly wisdom as finite man trying to understand an infinite God.

“Finite minds cannot conceive the Infinite; a being dependent for its existence upon another cannot attain to perfect knowledge either of its Creator or of itself. Circumstances color its consciousness of self, and its perception cannot pass beyond set bounds. Its activity is not self-caused, but due to the Creator. A being dependent on a Creator has perfect possession of none of its faculties, since its origin lies outside itself. Hence it is folly for that being to say that it has perfect knowledge of any matter. Its powers have limits, which it cannot modify. Only while it is under the delusion that its petty bounds are infinite can it make the empty boast of possessing wisdom. It is incapable of wisdom; its knowledge being limited to the range of its perception, and sharing the impotence of its dependent existence. Therefore Paul scorns and ridicules this masquerade of a finite nature boasting that it possesses the wisdom, which springs only from infinite knowledge. He says, ‘For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, not in the language of wisdom, lest the cross of Christ should be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to them that are perishing, but to them that are being saved it is the power of God’” (1 Corinthians 1:17).

By way of contrast to the Church in Corinth in 55 AD, one might compare the Church in Ephesus in 105 AD. Ignatius of Antioch wrote²⁰ to the Ephesians on his way to being led to Rome (and martyrdom) as follows:

“Men of flesh cannot act spiritually, nor can spiritual men act in a fleshly way, just as faith cannot perform the deeds of unfaith, or unfaith those of faith (compare Romans 8:5, 8). But what you (the Ephesians) do in relation to the flesh is spiritual, for you do everything in Jesus Christ”.

But yet Ignatius described²¹ the spirituality of the Church in Ephesus as unity tuned to the bishop’s purpose:

¹⁸ Leo the Great, Letters, CLXIV, 2.

¹⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, III, 24.

²⁰ Ignatius, Ad Ephesians, 8:2.

²¹ Ignatius, Ad Ephesians, 4:1-2.

“Therefore it is fitting for you to run your race together with the bishop’s purpose – as you do. For your presbytery – worthy of fame, worthy of God – as attuned to the bishop like strings to a lyre. Therefore by your unity and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. Each of you must be part of this chorus so that, being harmonious in unity and receiving God’s pitch in unison, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father. He will both hear you and recognize you, through what you do well, as members of His Son (1 Corinthians 12:27). Therefore it is profitable for you to be in flameless unison, so that you may always participate in God” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

In summary, the Orthodox Church understands the Lord’s Supper (the Bread of Heaven) to be, among other things, the paramount expression of Christian unity; thus the connection between the Gospel lesson (feeding the 5,000) and the Epistle lesson (disunity in Corinth). One of the responsibilities of the bishops – and thus the priests – is to shepherd the people into partaking of the Lord’s Supper by faith and to examine themselves before partaking (1 Corinthians 11:28). Paul chided the Corinthians on this and stated that because they didn’t do this many were weak and sick and many died (1 Corinthians 11:30). In Christendom today, this subject is much more important than many people think.