

a bad question. You came here to worship; to receive God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. You didn't come here to be entertained. Jesus didn't go into the wilderness to host a banquet for everyone following Him. Or did He? Philip doesn't think so. **"Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little" (Jn 6:7)** he says. Even if they had over a half year's wages on them, where would they buy the bread? It's a forty-mile hike back to Jerusalem. The disciples obviously failed the faith test. **"Andrew, Simon'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'" (Jn 6:9).**

Jesus wasn't really asking where to buy it. He was testing their faith to see if they trusted He would provide it. All of the Old Testament has its fulfillment in Christ. The wilderness was always a symbol of sin and judgment, for it wasn't the land flowing with milk and honey as the Promised Land was. This is why the Israelites had to wander in it for forty years after they rebelled against God following their deliverance from Egypt.

They would have rather been slaves in Egypt so they could sit around the meat pots than be in the wilderness where they had to trust that God would provide for them. And we are no different. We like cozy and comfortable far more than tense and uncomfortable, even if that means we sin in the process. Honestly, if you had the choice on the one hand to sit around a grill every day with the aroma of burger grease in the air, or sitting around a smoker filled with hickory or applewood chips and the smell of the finest meats wafting up into the air, but it meant you had to be a slave, or on the other hand you could follow Moses into the wilderness not knowing where your next meal is going to come from, you know the easier, more comfortable choice. It takes faith alone to choose following Moses. No human reason or rationale can lead you to choosing against the comfort of the meat pots – even if you're a vegan! You know, every year on Easter morning the smell of bacon comes up from downstairs right before we celebrate the Sacrament at the 8:00 service. How many people at that moment start craving bacon and eggs more than the body and blood of Jesus under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins? I'm not being silly here, you know the answer! And I'll be the first to admit it. We love our meat pots. We just call it by different names now.

So how should the disciples have answered Jesus when He asked them, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" I think they should have answered just like John answers the angel in **Revelation 7:14, "Lord, you know."** Lord, you know, and we trust you have a plan; you have it figured out.

We know how this story ends. Jesus takes the loaves, gives thanks, and distributes, and the people ate as **"much as they wanted" (Jn 6:11).** He provided for them. They followed Him out in the wilderness. He provided for them. In the Old Testament reading, the people followed Moses out into the wilderness, and despite their complaining, God provided for them. Well guess what? A greater Moses is here.

I trust that you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, are following Jesus where He leads you. Sometimes the paths before you seem like extreme wilderness. And I'm not talking about the kind of wilderness the Vicar and I like. I'm talking about the really hard times: the bad doctor's report for you or a loved one, the unexpected break-up, the ugly divorce, the painful cancer, the family situation where your adult children have deserted you and/or the Faith, losing an unborn baby in the womb, all the uncertainties that disrupt you from living in the cozy comforts of what we deem "normal life sitting around the meat pots" – that kind of wilderness.

Who is leading you? Who are you following? Is it Jesus? Yea? Then you have nothing to fear or worry about. He hasn't led you into the wilderness to die. He did that already for you when He was led out of Jerusalem to that hill outside the city carrying His own cross. Jesus has brought you to these difficult moments that you would trust Him. Trust Him. Don't doubt. Don't despair. Don't over analyze. Don't worry. The only thing God is testing is your faith. Trust Him. He's going to provide. He's going to provide a way out. He's going to provide healing. He's going to providing mending. Or, He's going to bring you or your loved one into heaven. That's not so bad, is it? Trust Him. Look what He did for those people in that grassy place two centuries ago. You are no less important to Christ than they were.

The twelve basketsful of leftovers were no coincidence. Each basket symbolized one of the twelve tribes of Israel, signifying that while Christ provided in overabundance for that particular crowd of people on that particular day in the wilderness, He was also providing for the rest of His people that *were not there*. That includes you. Today, He gives thanks, breaks bread, and distributes not mere bread, but also His body; not mere wine, but also His blood for the forgiveness of sins. *Laetare* – rejoice! Wherever Jesus is leading, follow Him, whether it's

here in “Jerusalem”, that is, Church, where we celebrate His feasts, or in the wilderness of life. Jesus is here. Jesus is there. Jesus is leading. Jesus is providing out of His great love and mercy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.