



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Sunday Next Before Advent, November 26th, 2017

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Along with sex, fantasy seems to dominate the entertainment business today. Wizards, elves, goblins, hobbits, orcs, vampires, werewolves, avatars and zombies dominate our television screens and bookshelves and, what's more, they populate Hollywood's most popular movies.

It is, thus, a bit jarring to learn that today's Gospel reading stands, among other things, as an awful warning about the dangers inherent in fantasy and fantasizing.

Most folks might find it a bit odd to think that St. John's account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the five thousand serves as a stern warning against letting your imaginations run riot.

But the reason Jesus needed to feed all those people was that not only his disciples, but the members of the crowd, themselves, were so preoccupied by visions of the glory they imagined lay in the future they didn't spare a thought for their needs of the day.

Jesus' followers failed to make the most basic arrangements for a long hike in the country because they were so preoccupied with what they fondly imagined were Jesus' plans for the future, they were blinded them to what he was actually doing in the here and now.

Though he never so much as hinted he was

preparing to launch a military uprising against the Romans occupiers, his disciples' imaginations led them to interpret his every move as directed towards this end. This, in turn, led them to fantasize about their own heroic roles in this great revolutionary enterprise rather than tackle the unglamorous practical tasks associated with an evangelical preaching tour.

It doesn't seem to have occurred to either the disciples or Jesus' thousands of fans that they had set off on a long hike to a wild and woolly locations, miles and miles from civilization without having made the slightest preparation for the journey. It didn't dawn on them that they were stranded without food until Jesus asked Philip the rhetorical question: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

The disciples should have packed their own rations and warned the folks in the crowd to bring food if they planned to tag along. Even so, the people in the crowd shouldn't have needed prompting to provide for themselves and their families before setting off in pursuit of the messiah. But disciples and hangers on, alike, were so preoccupied with their fantasies about the future, they failed to make provision for the here and now.

As a consequence, some 5,000 men – plus women and children – were stuck in the middle of nowhere with nothing to eat and

no hope of obtaining it. The situation was desperate.

If Jesus had been relying on Philip and his colleagues, his career as messiah would have been over. A campaign rally that concluded with 5,000-plus people suffering from malnourishment and heat stroke would have been as big a public relations disaster back then as it would be today.

Yet another surprising aspect to the whole affair is that the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand seems to have taken Philip and his fellow apostles completely by surprise. They must have known he was capable of astounding acts of creation. They had spent more than a year as his constant companions.

It is a common human failing to mistake our own agendas for God's agenda. This is why it is always worth viewing politicians who claim to be doing God's work with a certain skepticism. Indeed, skepticism, itself, is often a product of fantasy.

For example, an old Irishman was on his deathbed and his family called the parish priest to administer Last Rites. "Paddy, do you renounce the devil and all his works?" asks the priest. "No," says Paddy emphatically. "Paddy, do you understand me?" asks the priest. "Yes," says Paddy. "Well, Paddy, do you renounce the devil and all his works?" No," says Paddy. "Why not?" asks the priest. "Well," says Paddy, "In my situation, the last thing you want to do is be making enemies."

That's an example of fantasy at work. Fantasy is a real and present danger not just to our private and personal happiness, but to our eternal lives as well.

Fantasy is the reason the grass is always greener on the other side of the street.

It is the destroyer of families. It persuades spouses that life could be warmer, richer, more romantic with somebody else. It convinces children that their parents are

trying to thwart their ambitions and undermine their happiness.

It is the destroyer of contentment – seducing us into setting unreasonable goals for ourselves and for others. Rather more prosaically, it deflects our attention from the job at hand – work we should be doing for the good of our pocket books and our souls.

This is why fantasy is one of Satan's favorite tools. We think of it as a beguiling pastime but, in fact, it is a door the devil walks through. It delights him because we tend to see it as a harmless indulgence. We picture it as pleasurable, but in fact it inflicts on us far more pain than pleasure. We overlook the fact that worry is a much a product of fantasy as romantic daydreams.

Worry is closely related to fantasy. It similarly serves to deflect us from doing our duty to God. Both worry and fantasy prevent us from truly enjoying ourselves because they detract us from present reality – the only time we actually have to enjoy – and focus us on an imaginary future. Both encourage us to wish our lives away.

This is why Jesus warns us so strongly against it: "Seek first [God's] Kingdom and his righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The good news about the feeding the five thousand is that we don't need to worry about Jesus. He doesn't need our help. We simply need to keep focused on reality. The miracle is our guarantee that when things seem hopeless, he will take care of us. It's our assurance that he knows our needs better than we do. And that reality should more comforting than the most exotic or romantic of fantasies. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.