

- On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, not too far from the ruins of the ancient city of Capernaum, is an area known as Tabgha. It's the place our Lord liked to go to pray, to seek solitude, to find rest.
- It is also the site of today's Gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. In fact, there is a church and Benedictine monastery in Tabgha that mark the spot of where this miracle took place.
- The current church, which was built in 1982, was built on the site of a 4th century church that was destroyed in the 7th century during the Persian invasion of the Holy Land.
- While the church and monastery in Tabgha are quite beautiful, what is most interesting is the rock jutting out of the floor over which the altar is built. Tradition holds that it was on this rock that Jesus laid the 2 fish and 5 loaves that were multiplied to feed the hungry crowds.
- Directly in front of the rock and the altar is a famous mosaic from the original 4th century church that depicts two fish and a basket with four loaves of bread in it. You'll remember, however, that today's Gospel story mentions five loaves of bread.
- The fifth loaf is represented by the Eucharistic bread that is confectioned upon the altar at Mass and that is broken and shared, just as the bread in today's Gospel story was broken and shared amongst the people.
- So as this beautiful 4th century mosaic indicates, today's miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is a foreshadowing of the miracle of the Eucharist. And the Eucharist, my friends, is the greatest sign of God's absolute love and generosity toward us.
- Not content with being sent by the Father to become one of us; not content with dying a most awful and unjust death for us to save us from our sins; our Lord now humbles Himself to become our very food at every Mass.
- Jesus took up our human flesh in the Incarnation; He offered up His flesh in sacrifice as both priest and victim in the Crucifixion. And now He offers us His flesh as our true food in Holy Communion. This is a love and generosity most difficult to comprehend.
- It's a love and generosity that, if properly understood, both humbles and awes us.
- God's love and generosity to us is the theme of all our readings today. In the passage from Isaiah that we heard in our first reading, the Lord promises an abundance of food and drink without cost.
- He says: "Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David."
- It's clear from this passage that our Lord wants to assure us that we can always approach Him, no matter what our circumstances. There is no cost to His grace. Our Lord wishes only that we heed Him, that we listen to and obey Him.
- And then in our 2nd reading, taken from the magnificent 8th chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, we are reminded that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.
- Not *anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword!*
- Indeed, as St. Paul teaches us, it is through the suffering moments of life, when Christ is our only treasure and our only hope – when we rely solely on Him – that we *conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us.*

- And St. Paul doubles down on his confidence, stating: *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- So, what are we to make of such an effusion of love and mercy from our Lord?
- Remember that we hear from Isaiah today that if listen heedfully to our Lord and follow Him, He will renew with us the everlasting covenant He made with King David.
- The Hebrew term used to describe this everlasting covenant is *hesed*, which is a very important term in the Old Testament. It has a rather multifaceted meaning that incorporates mercy, steadfast love, affection, and fidelity.
- *Hesed* is the love that is to be shared between the two partners of a covenant. So, it's the love that God has for all the baptized, and it's the type of love that should be shared between man and wife.
- *Hesed* is really the fullness of all the various ways we describe love. It's a love that does not fail to continue loving, no matter what befalls it.
- And this is the love that God has for us being described in our readings today.
- What we're being told is that God wants us for Himself! He's willing to do all He must to bring us to Himself, regardless of our sins, our social status, or our state in life.
- Yet, while our Lord places no obstacles or barriers between us and Him in His great love for us, we often *do* place obstacles and barriers between God and ourselves.
- The biggest obstacle barring us from the love and mercy of God is sin, of course. Sin *is* what separates us from God. But to remove the barriers of sin, we need to look to the root causes of our sins and attachments, which for most of us is pride.
- Pride is the living heart of sin as there's an element of pride in every sin we commit.
- In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes: "There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty themselves There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others."
- Pride is the oldest sin. Long before Adam and Eve fell in the Garden, satan himself fell prey to this sin. It's his hallmark. And it's the greatest sin because it is the violation of the first and greatest commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."
- Pride puts one's self before God. Through pride we refuse God and His holy will. In truth, pride is a willful arrogance by which you arrogate to yourself what is really God's.
- And yet knowing our pride is part of the reason God is so effusive with His love and mercy. He knows our weakness in this regard, and He wants to heal us.
- Again, when we come to understand God's love and mercy, it humbles and awes us. The knowledge of His love heals our damnable pride and gives us the desire to be united to Him.
- Brothers and sisters, God makes so very clear today His great love for us, a love whose tangible manifestation we find in the Eucharist. May we all come to understand more deeply just how much God loves us.
- And may we always receive the Eucharist with all humility and awe, trusting that if we're willing to heed His voice, there will be nothing that can separate us from His love. Nothing at all.