

CHAPTER EIGHT

Concerning the seven loaves.

Concerning those who sought a sign.

Concerning the leaven of the Pharisees.

Concerning the blind man.

Concerning the Lord's question to His disciples in Caesarea.

Concerning the Lord's rebuke of Peter.

1-9. In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for some of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken pieces that were left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and He sent them away. The Lord had already worked a similar miracle on a previous occasion,¹ and now again He works a miracle, for good reason: the multitude had remained with Him for three days, and everyone's supply of food was exhausted. He did not always perform miracles with food, lest it appear that the multitudes were following Him for the sake of food. He would not have worked this miracle, were it not for the anticipated danger of hunger among the multitude. See how the disciples are still without understanding, not yet having acquired faith in His power which they had seen in His previous miracles. But He does not scold them, thus teaching us also not to give a harsh rebuke to those who are ignorant, but to forgive them their lack of understanding. Consider this

¹ Mk. 6:34-44

as well, that Christ desires to send no one away hungry, but He wants all to feast sumptuously from His gifts, especially all those who have remained with Him for three days, that is, who have been baptized. Baptism is called 'illumination', and it is performed by means of three immersions; therefore those who stayed with the Lord "three days" signify those who have been illumined by baptism.² He takes seven loaves, by which I mean the things of the Spirit, for the number seven is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit perfects and completes all things, and in the number seven both our life³ and this age⁴ are completed. The newly illumined eat and are satisfied, and they leave the leftover pieces, for they are not able to digest all divine truths. But when the Lord worked the miracle with five loaves, there were twelve baskets of broken pieces remaining, for there the multitude numbered five thousand, signifying those who are enslaved to the five senses; and this is why they were not able to eat much, but were satisfied by a little, leaving much left over. But here there are seven baskets, and fewer leftovers, because there are four thousand men, signifying those whose spiritual capacity has been enlarged by their practice of the four virtues⁵, and who therefore can digest more and leave less. What they could not eat is contained by the seven baskets, signifying those things which are the most spiritual and profound. We should also learn from the literal account that we ought to stop eating when we have satisfied our need, and not look for anything more. See how the multitude did not take for themselves the leftovers from the loaves after they had eaten and were satisfied. Instead, the disciples gathered up the remainder, just as they had done in the previous miracle with the five loaves. Likewise we ought to satisfy our hunger in moderation.

10-12. And straightway He entered into a boat with His disciples,

² The Greek word, translated here as "immersion", is *katadysis*. Its literal meaning is "sinking and submerging"; by metaphorical extension, it also means "sunset". The Greek word thus provides a more obvious relationship between "three days" and "three immersions" than exists in English.

³ "Three score years and ten" represent a full life; see Ps. 89:10.

⁴ The seven days of creation represent this age; the eighth day is eternity.

⁵ The "four universal virtues" are: courage, prudence, righteousness, and self-control. For a description of these, see Bl. Theophylact's Preface to his *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew*, op. cit., p.7.