

When St. John wrote down the account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the Holy Spirit guided him not only to get all the details correct and remember what he himself saw. He also guided John to draw attention to certain details showing how Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament taught. Jesus didn't come out of nowhere. No, he came forth from God the Father. He is the eternal Son of God – God from God, Light from Light, very God from very God. And he also came to fulfill what the Holy Spirit caused the prophets to speak and write down. Jesus is what the whole Bible is about. He is the Lord himself who brought Israel out of Egypt, who fed them with manna in the wilderness, who brought them into Canaan, which he had promised to their father Abraham. He is the Shepherd who promised to seek after his lost sheep. He is the Lord who commanded Moses to kill the Passover Lamb and wipe the blood on the doors of the children of Israel, causing death to pass over their houses. He is the true Passover Lamb who has come to shed his own blood to take away the sin of the world. So when John tells us the real stories about our Lord's earthly life, death, and resurrection, he is led by the Holy Spirit to point out certain details, which show that Jesus is the God of Israel.

There are two details John gives in our Gospel lesson for today. These two details seem like side comments, which aren't all that important to the story. But as Jesus often says, "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!" The first detail is that the Feast of the Passover was near. The other is that there was a lot of grass in that place. Without these details, John could still have told us the account of Jesus multiplying only five loaves of bread and two small fish to feed five thousand men and their families. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also recorded this account, but they draw attention to other details. Matthew and Mark mention the green grass, but they don't highlight this detail like John does. None of them point out that the Passover Feast was approaching. Yet, all three of these other Evangelists gave faithful accounts of Jesus feeding five thousand households with five loaves and two fish.

The Holy Spirit has given us four Gospel accounts, because he not only wants us to have certainty about the events of our Lord's earthly life, death, and resurrection. He also wants to teach us from every possible angle about how Jesus fulfills what the prophets foretold. So let's address these two details to which the Holy Spirit draws our attention.

The Passover was near. The Passover was the most important feast God gave Israel to observe. It took place in the evening of the fourteenth day of their first month. They followed a Lunar calendar, so this would fall anywhere between March 19th/20th and April 22nd/23rd. It was on this day that God killed every firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, and he spared the households of Israel. He had each household of Israel kill a lamb, wipe the lamb's blood on their doors, cook the lamb thoroughly, and eat it quickly in their houses with bread that doesn't have any yeast in it.

Now, let's consider this for a moment. There are two things that stick out. The first has to do with the firstborn of every household. God was about to kill the firstborn son of every Egyptian household, and the firstborn of every household of Israel was spared because of the blood of the Passover lamb. Each Passover lamb took the place of the firstborn. It was sacrificed in his place. This was a foreshadow of Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, firstborn from all eternity, who would take the place of all people from every household of every nation.

The second thing that sticks out is the people were to eat unleavened bread, or bread with no yeast in it. In fact, God commanded that when this feast was to be observed in the years to come the people were to sweep their houses and get rid of any yeast or leaven in their homes. Now, today this might not seem like that big of a deal. After all, we could just go and buy more yeast at the store when it's all done. But

these people needed to grow yeast. To get rid of all your yeast meant that after the feast is all finished you need to start from scratch again. This also served as an object lesson for them. They were to leave behind any influences from Egypt or any other nations and not let their false religions influence their worship. A little yeast leavens the whole lump. This is why we are should be careful not to allow any false doctrine into our churches.

John points out this detail that the Passover Feast was near. Jesus had gone out into the wilderness, and a huge crowd followed him. He was teaching. His teaching was pure. It didn't have any yeast in it. And just as the people were to get rid of all the yeast in their house, the great crowd following Jesus into the wilderness had nothing but our Lord's words to depend on. There was only one boy with a few pieces of bread and fish. This was nothing among so many people. Instead, as Jesus would later explain to this crowd, he himself is the bread of life. He is their true food and drink. Just as the Passover lamb was sacrificed to give life to the children of Israel, Jesus was about to be sacrificed, giving his flesh for the life of the world.

Jesus, the Passover Lamb, the Firstborn, the Son of the Father, was about to give himself as the true sacrifice. He was about to shed his own innocent blood to take away the sin of the whole world. He has the true life in himself, which alone lasts forever. Those who have him as their Shepherd will have no want. They will never go hungry. They will be satisfied for all time through his life-giving Word. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples this. He therefore asked Philip where they could send these people to buy bread so that they could eat. Obviously, there was nowhere they could go. Philip knew that even if there were places near by, they wouldn't be able to afford it. Andrew, pointing out the boy with five loaves and two fish, asked, "What are these among so many?" Jesus then told the people to sit down. And here is where St. John gives us the other special detail. There was much grass in the place.

So let's consider this detail as well. Just as Jesus is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, he is also the Shepherd of the flock. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus calls himself the good Shepherd who gives his life up for the sheep. He is the Shepherd whom David describes in Psalm 23, who makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside the still waters, and restores my soul. He is the door of the sheep. As he would later explain, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." So even though they are in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit points out this detail. There was much grass in that place. With Christ there is green pasture. There is life. He is the Passover Lamb who gives himself for the life of the world. He feeds us and shepherds us.

Jesus fed the five thousand households, and there were plenty of left overs. As we sing in Psalm 23, "My cup runneth over." He is God, the same God who provided manna, bread from heaven, to his people Israel when they were in the wilderness. He does this both for the thankful and the thankless alike, for those who trust in him as well as for those who grumble against him.

As this chapter of John progresses, Jesus tells the people that he came into the world to give his flesh into death so that they could have their true bread only in him. They didn't like what they were hearing. So they grumbled against him and abandoned him. They loved the great sign he did with the bread and the fish. In fact, they wanted to make him king because of it. It's as if he had really proven himself to them. But Jesus withdrew from them. Because he didn't come to be an earthly king. He is the living bread from heaven. He is the Passover Lamb and good Shepherd who came to be sacrificed for our sins. The people who were so willing to be his subjects would eventually hate and despise him. Yet, as the

caring Lord he was, Jesus still provided for them. He still gave them more than they could even ask. The just and the unjust alike were graced with the presence of God and fed by his hand.

And so these two details stick out. Passover was near. And there was a lot of grass in that place. Christ did not come to win favoritism from the world. He didn't come to rule with tanks and armies. He came to give his own life up for sinners so that the wrath of God would pass over us. He came to lead us into green pastures and beside the still waters, feeding us with his sweet and pure words. What he says and gives us is completely undefiled, without any worldly leaven of error or ill will. This is how he feeds us. He gives us his precious body and pure blood in a festival of unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. There is nothing better to eat and drink than this. There is no greener pasture or purer food for our souls. Amen.