

In our Collect of the Day, the prayer that serves to bring out the theme for the day, we spoke to God concerning His “never-failing providence.” In simpler terms, that just means that God always cares for us and always gives us what we need.

This truth is one that we easily grasp with our minds. Yet believing it in our heart, truly trusting that God will never fail to provide for us, that is often much more of a struggle, a struggle that repeats over and over again. This struggle is seen in our Gospel lesson.

But there’s not only struggle; the Lord provides comfort, both in the reading and all throughout Scripture. Earthly circumstances may change, but the Lord’s care for His people never fails.

The feeding of the four thousand in our Gospel isn’t the first of Jesus’ miracles. He’s done many, many signs before this, include signs where He provides for people miraculously.

In His first sign at the wedding in Cana, Jesus provided wine for an entire wedding. As He started to call His first disciples, He provided an incredible, net-breaking catch of fish for Peter, James, and John. And at some point before feeding these four thousand, Jesus miraculously provided for five thousand men, plus all the women and children who were with them, using a few loaves and fish like in this instance.

Jesus was constantly demonstrating God’s never-failing providence as He went about teaching and preaching on the Kingdom of God.

With these examples, it’s easy to look at the disciples in this story and wonder how they could be so clueless, so empty-headed. We hear them say, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” and we perhaps chuckle or groan. They’ve been here before! Thousands of hungry people, a few loaves and fish, Jesus... c’mon guys! You’re really going to ask that question?

Yet before we too hastily condemn the disciples’ lack of trust and understanding, we might look a little closer at their situation, not that we’ll find something to excuse their doubt, but because we might just find something that we do as well.

Sure, Jesus had fed thousands before, but that time the crowd had only been with Him for the day. Now, it’s been three days! If any little boy had brought a lunch, he’d surely have eaten it by now.

And last time, there was much green grace, a more hospitable place. Now, they’re in a desolate place, in the wilderness – much worse!

And last time, it was just missing dinner that was the worry. Now, the crowd is so hungry that even Jesus acknowledges that they might faint on the way home! Much worse! It’s completely different this time!

How often do we think that? “Jesus took care of me that time, but this time it’s different!” “The Lord delivered me from that trouble, but this one is much worse!”

God has seen you through all sorts of health problems, but after a visit to the doctor, worries begin to flood your mind.

Our Father has provided you with your daily bread every day, but as the news fills with reports of recession and inflation, and your retirement funds start to wither away, anxiety begins to get a hold of you.

The Lord has preserved His people of all times and places, yet election season comes along and you start to think that if the right people aren't elected, all our rights will be taken away and it'll be the end as we know it! I'm sure you can think up many more examples, but they all tend to be variations on the theme. It's completely different this time!

If we could remove ourselves from the moment, look at our problems objectively and without emotion, we'd realize that our doubts and anxieties are really no different from the disciples worrying about how to feed four thousand people in the wilderness.

Our sinful flesh, like that of the disciples, leads us to doubt the power, the knowledge, and the love of our God. When the Holy Spirit brings our sins of doubt and unbelief before our consciences, convicting us of them, we must not think that we can excuse them or justify them by saying that "this time it's different." God knows the situation far better than you or I do.

While it may be true that the situation or trouble is somewhat different than last time, God remains the same. As He spoke through His prophet Malachi, "I the LORD do not change." In the book of Hebrews we read that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The never-failing providence of God is grounded in this truth, and this is our great comfort as we face the different trials of this life.

Part of God's unchanging nature is His almighty power. God was infinitely powerful before time began, and He will be infinitely powerful forever.

By His might He brought the entire universe into existence from nothing. As we heard in Genesis, the Lord God took simple dust from the ground and created man, the creation which He chose to bear His divine image.

When God became a man Himself, He chose to veil that power so as to not overwhelm everyone, and yet even in His humility He calmed storms, fed thousands, threw out demons, and even raised the dead. Such was His power that even death could not hold Him. By His death He broke the power of death, and by His rising again He showed what awaits all who believe in Him.

This is the same God who watches over you. This is the same God who provides for you. This is the same God who defends you from all danger and evil. If our God is greater than death and hell, He is most certainly greater than bodily illness or political scheming or economic forces or anything that confronts us.

Your Lord used seven loaves to feed four thousand people. He will not fail to give you your daily bread, whatever the circumstance you face.

As your God is eternally, infinitely powerful, He is also eternally, infinitely knowing. Our sinful flesh brings doubt through uncertainty, but with God there is no such thing as uncertainty. We ask “what if” and stress about all the possibilities we think up, but with God there is no such question. With God there is simply what is.

He knows all; He sees all, from the entirety of human history to the most seemingly-inconsequential moments that no one bothers to remember. The God who knows the precise arrangement of all the stars and galaxies in the universe at the same time knows the exact number of hairs upon your head.

And beyond mere physical, material things, the Lord God knows the thoughts, the desires, the struggles of every person’s heart and mind. He knows the reality expressed by St. Paul in Romans 7, how Christians constantly struggle against their sinful desires, not doing what we know we should do and doing what we know we should not do.

He knows that we cannot overcome the temptations to doubt and worry on our own. And, He knows perfectly what is needed to deliver us from these temptations and sins.

God’s perfect power and perfect knowledge are connected to one other unchanging and perfect aspect of God: His perfect love. God’s love is part of who God is; His love always has been and always will be.

He didn’t make man to show off His power or wisdom, though His power and His wisdom are clearly visible in creation, especially in mankind. No, God gathered that dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into it out of love, that He might share His love and joy and peace with us.

Even when we reject His love and turn sinfully inward, He still loves us. You’ve no doubt heard John 3:16 many times. It doesn’t say, “For God was so powerful that He sent His only-begotten Son,” or “For God knew so much that He sent His only-begotten Son,” though God is all-powerful and all-knowing. No, “For God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Why did Jesus feed the four thousand? He said, “I have compassion on the crowd.” Compassion. Love. Jesus came and hung on the cross for you out of love. And that love which kept Him there, which caused Him to suffer the wrath of God and the agony of hell, that is the love He has for you right now. That is the love He has for you each and every moment of your entire life.

God’s love is what moves Him to use His great power and knowledge. Jesus didn’t look at the starving crowds with utmost compassion and just say “I feel really bad for them,” and then do nothing. No, His love moved Him to act, to provide.

He didn’t look at all of humanity dying in our sins and say, “that’s too bad.” He loved us, so He laid down His life for us. “Greater love hath no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends.” You and I are miserable sinners who keep on doubting and worrying, and yet Jesus – God in the flesh – calls us His friends. You are a friend of the Almighty God! And that God laid down His life for you!

Whenever the devil should attack you with doubt and worry, look to the cross. Your Lord calls you His friends. God the Father makes you His children. Even earthly friends and fathers know to give good things to those they love. How much more will You perfect heavenly Father give you what He knows is good for you?

This world will try to tell you that God's ways aren't truly good or loving. Satan will say that what God has said in His Word is outdated or hateful or simply wrong. Your sinful flesh will wonder if God truly can deliver you this time.

It may be different this time, but your God is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, unchanging and unchangeable. Your God's power cannot be exhausted. Your God's knowledge encompasses everything. And your God's love is such that He gave His own Son up for you. His providence will never fail, not in this life, nor in the life to come.

In the name of Jesus, amen.