

① 【Manna, the bread from heaven】

When the Israelites entered the wilderness, they complained to Moses: "In Egypt we sat before pots of meat and ate bread to our fill. Now we are starving to death. We would have been better off dying in Egypt." God heard their complaints and provided quail in the evening and manna from heaven in the morning, satisfying the Israelites. In the morning, dew fell around the camp. When it evaporated, a fine, flaky substance remained. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. The people called it manna. Moses instructed them, "Each of you is to gather as much as you need—one omer per person." (Exodus 16:16) An omer is 2.3 liters. Some gathered much, some gathered little, but when measured with a basket, those who gathered much had no excess, and those who gathered little had no shortage; each gathered only what they needed. Though Moses commanded, "No one is to keep any of it until morning" (Exodus 16:19), some did keep it. But it bred worms and stank, and they could not eat it. When the sun grew hot, it melted away, so the people had to gather it every morning. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual. Even if left until the next morning, it did not become infested with worms or stink. It is remarkable that only what was gathered on the sixth day remained free from worms. This was because no manna fell on the seventh day, the Sabbath. God provided two days' worth of bread for those who kept the Sabbath for worship, ensuring they would always have enough to eat. This teaches that working on the Sabbath yields nothing.

② 【Jesus is the bread that comes down from heaven】

Now Jesus performed a miracle in the wilderness, feeding a crowd of over five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. The crowd who witnessed this miracle followed Jesus, thinking that if they stayed with him, they would never go hungry again. To them, Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6:27). This food that leads to eternal life is Jesus himself.

● What do most people seek when they come to church? Daily peace, the necessities of life like food and shelter, healing from sickness and good health, peace of mind? These are all things of this world. If people couldn't obtain these things, would they still come to church? Even if ten people leave a cult, only one of them will start attending church seeking God. The other nine won't come. How many people come with a heart that truly desires to know Jesus Christ, to encounter Jesus Christ?

The crowd said, "Send down bread from heaven for us to eat, just as our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness." Then Jesus said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (6:41). "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But this is the bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will never die. " (6:48-50). He declares that He Himself is the bread from heaven and commands them to eat Him. He further states more plainly, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ... For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (6:53-55). This unmistakably symbolizes the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist, we eat Christ. We see that the manna that fell from heaven in Old Testament times was actually a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

③ **Faith and life from heaven last but a day**

Then, wouldn't the characteristics that occurred with manna also apply to Jesus in the same way? Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Therefore, Christ's words also become food. And the Holy Communion, which is the body and blood of Christ, also becomes food. Through these two, Christ's life enters into us. From this, we understand the following:

First, it is said that each person gathered only what they needed. This means that whether one reads much or little of God's word, the necessary words for that person are always given. Often after a sermon, one hears someone say, "Today's sermon felt like it was spoken directly to me. It was exactly what I needed right now." I cannot know beforehand what troubles or state of heart that person is in. Yet, God always gives the necessary words to those who seek.

Second, we must hear God's word daily. And we must hear it in the morning. The manna melted by noon. Hearing it in the morning means reading the Bible before beginning our activities. Regarding communion, people in the past came to church on Sunday mornings without eating anything. They had to fast before communion. Breakfast is called "breakfast." "Break" means "to break," and 'fast' means "fasting." Therefore, breakfast literally means "breaking the fast." It is desirable that the first thing eaten that day be the Lord's Supper. Those who faithfully practice this are nuns and monks.

Thirdly, the heavenly command can only dwell within us for one day. If manna was saved until the next day, it became infested with worms and stank. Therefore, manna had to be gathered daily. Faith lasts only for that day. I believe God's command, the heavenly thing, cannot remain long within the decaying earthly body. The Bible states, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal" (Genesis 6:3), and St. Paul writes, "What is perishable cannot inherit what is imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Thus, the early church celebrated the Eucharist daily. "They devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple every

day, breaking bread in their homes...” (Acts 2:46) I believe the communion bread itself was truly meant to last only that day. The effect of the communion bread received during worship is entirely different from that of the holy bread taken home afterward. Indeed, the Eucharist received during worship truly empowers us and opens our eyes. However, because they put the manna in jars and placed it before the Lord, storing it for generations (16:33), I believe this is how the practice of preserving the Eucharistic elements originated. In both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the consecrated bread is kept in the tabernacle.

● Jesus told His disciples, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20) He was saying they didn't even have faith as small as a mustard seed! Yet the disciples thought they possessed great faith. Don't we also think we have faith? Faith is different from Christian knowledge. Knowledge makes us think, “Oh, I've heard this story, I know it,” but it lacks the power to believe in Christ. The power to believe vanishes quickly. It might last a few hours. If you go two or three days without reading the Bible or praying, you become complacent, no longer need Christ, and your faith disappears. Faith comes from God, so we must seek it daily and keep receiving it daily. Faith exists only when we worship and pray toward God—that is, only when we are connected to God.

Writing this might make you think Christian faith is weak. But when you keep reading the Bible daily, listening to God's word, offering prayers, and partaking of the sacrament—though it's a small thing—this repetition makes heavenly things, God's life, flow swiftly and easily into the human body. In an instant, the Holy Spirit fills you, and heaven is created within your heart. Those who don't do this struggle because their bodies aren't accustomed to heavenly things; God's life doesn't enter easily, and eventually, they close themselves off.

● Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara, former honorary director of St. Luke's International Hospital, wrote this: “Life, in a word, is habit. Aristotle said habit is repeated action, and that habit shapes human character and virtue. Those who pay attention to habit early on will likely reap great rewards in life, while those who disregard habit will find their lives ending in emptiness.”

While we have time, let us make our Christian life sure. I want to prepare to draw near to heavenly things, establish a connection between heaven and earth, and become accustomed to the divine.