

"The Gospel Feast"
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"When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" John vi. 5.

1 AFTER these words the Evangelist adds, "And this He said to prove him, for He Himself
2 knew what He would do." Thus, you see, our Lord had secret meanings when He
3 spoke, and did not bring forth openly all His divine sense at once. He knew what He
4 was about to do from the first, but He wished to lead forward His disciples, and to arrest
5 and open their minds, before He instructed them: for all cannot receive His words, and
6 on the blind and deaf the most sacred truths fall without profit.

7 And thus, throughout the course of His gracious dispensations from the beginning, it
8 may be said that the Author and Finisher of our faith has hid things from us in mercy,
9 and listened to our questionings, while He Himself knew what He was about to do. He
10 has hid, in order afterwards to reveal, that then, on looking back on what He said and
11 did before, we may see in it what at the time we did not see, and thereby see it to more
12 profit. Thus He hid Himself from the disciples as He walked with them to Emmaus: thus
13 Joseph, too, under different and yet similar circumstances, hid himself from his
14 brethren.

15 With this thought in our minds, surely we seem to see a new and further meaning still, in
16 the narrative before us. Christ spoke of buying bread, when He intended to create or
17 make bread; but did He not, in that bread which He made, intend further that Heavenly
18 bread which is the salvation of our souls?—for He goes on to say, "Labour not for the
19 meat" or food "which perisheth, but for that food which endureth unto everlasting life,
20 which the Son of man shall give unto you." Yes, surely the wilderness is the world, and
21 the Apostles are His priests, and the multitudes are His people; and that feast, so
22 suddenly, so unexpectedly provided, is the Holy Communion. He alone is the same, He
23 the provider of the loaves then, of the heavenly manna now. All other things change, but
24 He remaineth.

25 And what is that Heavenly Feast which we now are vouchsafed, but in its own turn the
26 earnest and pledge of that future feast in His Father's kingdom, when "the marriage of
27 the Lamb shall come, and His wife hath made herself ready," and "holy Jerusalem
28 cometh down from God out of heaven," and "blessed shall they be who shall eat bread
29 in the kingdom of God"?

30 And further, since to that Feast above we do lift up our eyes, though it will not come till
31 the end; and as we do not make remembrance of it once only, but continually, in the
32 sacred rite which foreshadows it; therefore, in like manner, not in the miracle of the
33 loaves only, though in that especially, but in all parts of Scripture, in history, and in
34 precept, and in promise, and in prophecy, is it given us to see the Gospel Feast typified

35 and prefigured, and that immortal and never-failing Supper in the visible presence of the
36 Lamb which will follow upon it at the end. And if they are blessed who shall eat and
37 drink of that table in the kingdom, so too blessed are they who meditate upon it, and
38 hope for it now,—who read Scripture with it in their thoughts, and endeavour to look
39 beneath the veil of the literal text, and to catch a sight of the gleams of heavenly light
40 which are behind it. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear;
41 for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see
42 those things which ye see, but have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye
43 hear, and have not heard them." "Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have
44 believed." Blessed they who see in and by believing, and who have, because they doubt
45 not.

46 Let us, then, at this time of year [\[Note\]](#), as is fitting, follow the train of thought thus
47 opened upon us, and, looking back into the Sacred Volume, trace the intimations and
48 promises there given of that sacred and blessed Feast of Christ's Body and Blood which
49 it is our privilege now to enjoy till the end come.

50 Now the Old Testament, as we know, is full of figures and types of the Gospel; types
51 various, and, in their literal wording, contrary to each other, but all meeting and
52 harmoniously filled in Christ and His Church. Thus the histories of the Israelites in the
53 wilderness, and of the Israelites when settled in Canaan, alike are ours, representing
54 our present state as Christians. Our Christian life is a state of faith and trial; it is also a
55 state of enjoyment. It has the richness of the promised land; it has the marvellousness
56 of the desert. It is a "good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that
57 spring out of vallies and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and
58 pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread
59 without scarceness; thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and
60 out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." And, on the other hand, it is still a land which
61 to the natural man seems a wilderness, a "great and terrible wilderness, wherein are
62 fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there is no water;" where faith is still
63 necessary, and where, still more forcibly than in the case of Israel, the maxim holds,
64 that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the
65 mouth of the Lord doth man live."

66 This is the state in which we are,—a state of faith and of possession. In the desert the
67 Israelites lived by the signs of things, without the realities: manna was to stand for the
68 corn, oil, and honey, of the good land promised; water, for the wine and milk. It was a
69 time for faith to exercise itself; and when they came into the promised land, then was
70 the time of possession. That was the land of milk and honey; they needed not any
71 divinely provided compensations or expedients. Manna was not needed, nor the pillar of
72 the cloud, nor the water from the rock. But we Christians, on the contrary, are at once in
73 the wilderness and in the promised land. In the wilderness, because we live amid
74 wonders; in the promised land, because we are in a state of enjoyment. That we are in
75 the state of enjoyment is surely certain, unless all the prophecies have failed; and that
76 we are in a state in which faith alone has that enjoyment, is plain from the fact that
77 God's great blessings are not seen, and in that the Apostle says, "We walk by faith, not

78 by sight." In a word, we are in a super-natural state,—a word which implies both its
79 greatness and its secretness: for what is above nature, is at once not seen, and is more
80 precious than what is seen; "the things which are seen are temporal, the things which
81 are not seen are eternal."

82 And if our state altogether is parallel to that of the Israelites, as an antitype to its type, it
83 is natural to think that so great a gift as Holy Communion would not be without its
84 appropriate figures and symbols in the Old Testament. All that our Saviour has done is
85 again and again shadowed out in the Old Testament; and this, therefore, it is natural to
86 think, as well as other things: His miraculous birth, His life, His teaching, His death, His
87 priesthood, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His glorification, His kingdom, are again and
88 again prefigured: it is not reasonable to suppose that if this so great gift is really given
89 us, it should be omitted. He who died for us, is He who feeds us; and as His death is
90 mentioned, so we may beforehand expect will be mentioned the feast He gives us. Not
91 openly indeed, for neither is His death nor His priesthood taught openly, but covertly,
92 under the types of David or Aaron, or other favoured servants of God; and in like
93 manner we might expect, and we shall find, the like reverent allusions to His most
94 gracious Feast,—allusions which we should not know to *be* allusions but for the event;
95 just as we should not know that Solomon, Aaron, or Samuel, stood for Christ at all,
96 except that the event explains the figure. When Abraham said to Isaac, "God will
97 provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering," who can doubt this is a prophecy
98 concerning Christ?—yet we are nowhere told it in Scripture. The case is the same as
99 regards the Sacrament of Baptism. Now that it is given, we cannot doubt that the
100 purifications of the Jews, Naaman's bathing, and the prophecy of a fountain being
101 opened for sin and all uncleanness, have reference to it, as being the visible fulfilment
102 of the great spiritual cleansing: and St. Peter expressly affirms this of the Deluge, and
103 St. Paul of the passage of the Red Sea. And in like manner passages in the Bible,
104 which speak prophetically of the Gospel Feast, cannot but refer (if I may so speak) to
105 the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as being, in fact, the Feast given us under the
106 Gospel.

107 And let it be observed, directly we know that we have this great gift, and that the Old
108 Testament history prefigures it, we have a light thrown upon what otherwise is a
109 difficulty; for, it may be asked with some speciousness, whether the Jews were not in a
110 higher state of privilege than we Christians, until we take this gift into account. It may be
111 objected that our blessings are all future or distant,—the hope of eternal life, which is to
112 be fulfilled hereafter, God's forgiveness, who is in heaven: what do we gain now and
113 here above the Jews? God loved the Jews, and He gave them something; He gave
114 them present gifts; the Old Testament is full of the description of them; He gave them
115 "the precious things of heaven, and the dew, and the deep that coucheth beneath, and
116 precious things brought forth by the sun, and by the moon, and the chief things of the
117 ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, and the precious things of
118 the earth, and the fulness thereof," "honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock,
119 butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan,
120 and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat, and the pure blood of the grape." [Deut.
121 xxxii. 13; xxxiii. 13-15.] These were present real blessings. What has He given *us*?—

122 *nothing* in possession? *all* in promise? This, I say, is in itself not likely; it is not likely that
123 He should so reverse His system, and make the Gospel inferior to the Law. But the
124 knowledge of the great gift under consideration clears up this perplexity; for every
125 passage in the Old Testament which speaks of the temporal blessings given by God to
126 His ancient people, instead of conveying to us a painful sense of destitution, and
127 exciting our jealousy, reminds us of our greater blessedness; for every passage which
128 belongs to them is fulfilled now in a higher sense to us. We have no need to envy them.
129 God did not take away their blessings, without giving us greater. The Law was not so
130 much taken away, as the Gospel given. The Gospel supplanted the Law. The Law went
131 out by the Gospel's coming in. Only our blessings are not seen; *therefore* they are
132 higher, *because* they are unseen. Higher blessings could not be visible. How could
133 spiritual blessings be visible ones? If Christ now feeds us, not with milk and honey, but
134 "with the spiritual food of His most precious Body and Blood;" if "our sinful bodies are
135 made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood," truly
136 we are not without our precious things, any more than Israel was: but they are unseen,
137 because so much greater, so spiritual; they are given only under the veil of what is
138 seen: and thus we Christians are both with the Church in the wilderness as regards
139 faith, and in the Church in Canaan as regards enjoyment; having the fulfilment of the
140 words spoken by Moses, repeated by our Lord, to which I just now referred, "Man shall
141 not live by bread only, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

142 Now, then, I will refer to some passages of both the Old Testament and the New, which
143 both illustrate and are illustrated by this great doctrine of the Gospel.

144 1. And, first, let it be observed, from the beginning, the greatest rite of religion has been
145 a feast; the partaking of God's bounties, in the way of nature, has been consecrated to a
146 more immediate communion with God Himself. For instance, when Isaac was weaned,
147 Abraham "made a great feast," [Gen. xxi. 10.] and then it was that Sarah prophesied;
148 "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," she said, prophesying the introduction of the
149 spirit, grace, and truth, which the Gospel contains, instead of the bondage of the
150 outward forms of the Law. Again, it was at a feast of savoury meat that the spirit of
151 prophecy came upon Isaac, and he blessed Jacob. In like manner the first beginning of
152 our Lord's miracles was at a marriage feast, when He changed water into wine; and
153 when St. Matthew was converted he entertained our Lord at a feast. At a feast, too, our
154 Lord allowed the penitent woman to wash with tears and anoint His feet, and
155 pronounced her forgiveness; and at a feast, before His passion, He allowed Mary to
156 anoint them with costly ointment, and to wipe them with her hair. Thus with our Lord,
157 and with the Patriarchs, a feast was a time of grace; so much so, that He was said by
158 the Pharisees to come eating and drinking, to be "a winebibber and gluttonous, a friend
159 of publicans and sinners." [Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.]

160 And next, in order to make this feasting still more solemn, it had been usual at all times
161 to precede it by a direct act of religion,—by a prayer, or blessing, or sacrifice, or by the
162 presence of a priest, which implied it. Thus, when Melchizedek came out to meet
163 Abraham, and *bless* him, "he brought forth bread and wine;" [Gen. xiv. 18.] to which it is
164 added, "and he was the priest of the Most High God." Such, too, was the lamb of the

165 Passover, which was eaten roast with fire, and with unleavened bread, and bitter herbs,
166 with girded loins and shoes on, and staff in hand; as the Lord's Passover, being a
167 solemn religious feast, even if not a sacrifice. And such seems to have been the
168 common notion of communion with God all the world over, however it was gained; viz.
169 that we arrived at the possession of His invisible gifts by participation in His visible; that
170 there was some mysterious connexion between the seen and the unseen; and that, by
171 setting aside the choicest of His earthly bounties, as a specimen and representative of
172 the whole, presenting it to Him for His blessing, and then taking, eating, and
173 appropriating it, we had the best hope of gaining those unknown and indefinite gifts
174 which human nature needs. This the heathen practised towards their idols also; and St.
175 Paul seems to acknowledge that in that way they did communicate, though most
176 miserably and fearfully, with those idols, and with the evil spirits which they represented.
177 "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I
178 would not that ye should hold communion with devils." [1 Cor. x. 20.] Here, as before, a
179 feast is spoken of as the means of communicating with the unseen world, though, when
180 the feast was idolatrous, it was the fellowship of evil spirits.

181 3. And next let this be observed, that the descriptions in the Old Testament of the
182 perfect state of religious privilege, viz. that under the Gospel which was then to come,
183 are continually made under the image of a feast, a feast of some special and choice
184 goods of this world, corn, wine, and the like; goods of this world chosen from the mass
185 as a specimen of all, as types and means of seeking, and means of obtaining, the
186 unknown spiritual blessings, which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard." And these special
187 goods of nature, so set apart, are more frequently than any thing else, corn or bread,
188 and wine, as the figures of what was greater, though others are mentioned also. Now
189 the first of these of which we read is the fruit of the tree of life, the leaves of which are
190 also mentioned in the prophets. The tree of life was that tree in the garden of Eden, the
191 eating of which would have made Adam immortal; a divine gift lay hid in an outward
192 form. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of it afterwards in the following words, showing that a
193 similar blessing was in store for the redeemed:—"By the river, upon the bank thereof, on
194 this side, and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade,
195 neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed. It shall bring forth new fruits according to his
196 months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof
197 shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." [Ezek. xlvii. 12.] Like to which is St.
198 John's account of the tree of life, "which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her
199 fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." [Rev.
200 xxii. 2.] And hence we read in the Canticles of the apple-tree, and of sitting down under
201 its shadow, and its fruit being sweet to the taste. Here then in type is signified the
202 sacred gift of which I am speaking; and yet it has not seemed good to the gracious
203 Giver literally to select fruit or leaves as the means of His invisible blessings. He might
204 have spiritually fed us with such, had He pleased—for man liveth not by bread only, but
205 by the word of His mouth. His Word might have made the fruit of the tree His
206 Sacrament, but He has willed otherwise.

207 The next selection of gifts of the earth which we find in Scripture, is the very one which
208 He at length fixed on, bread and wine, as in the history of Melchizedek; and there the

209 record stands as a prophecy of what was to be: for who is Melchizedek but our Lord and
210 Saviour, and what is the Bread and Wine but the very feast which He has ordained?

211 Next the great gift was shadowed out in the description of the promised land, which was
212 said to flow with milk and honey, and in all those other precious things of nature which I
213 have already recounted as belonging to the promised land, oil, butter, corn, wine, and
214 the like. These all may be considered to refer to the Gospel feast typically, because they
215 were the rarest and most exquisite of the blessings given to the Jews, as the Gospel
216 Feast is the most choice and most sacred of all the blessings given to us Christians;
217 and what is most precious under the one Dispensation is signified by what is most
218 precious under the other.

219 Now let us proceed to the Prophets, and we shall find the like anticipation of the Gospel
220 Feast.

221 For instance, you recollect, the prophet Hosea says: "It shall come to pass in that day, I
222 will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the
223 earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel. And I
224 will sow her unto Me in the earth." [Hos. ii. 21-23.] By Jezreel is meant the Christian
225 Church; and the Prophet declares in God's name, that the time was to come when the
226 Church would call upon the corn, wine, and oil, and they would call on the earth, and the
227 earth on the heavens, and the heavens on God; and God should answer the heavens,
228 and the heavens should answer the earth, and the earth should answer the corn, wine,
229 and oil, and they should answer to the wants of the Church. Now, doubtless, this may
230 be fulfilled only in a general way; but considering Almighty God has appointed corn or
231 bread, and wine, to be the special instruments of His ineffable grace,—He, who sees
232 the end from the beginning, and who views all things in all their relations at once,—He,
233 when He spoke of corn and wine, knew that the word would be fulfilled, not generally
234 only, but even literally in the Gospel.

235 Again: the prophet Joel says, "It shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall
236 drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall
237 flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall
238 water the valley of Shittim." [Joel iii. 18.] How strikingly is this fulfilled, if we take it to
239 apply to what God has given us in the Gospel, in the feast of the Holy Communion!

240 Again: the prophet Amos says: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when the
241 plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed;
242 and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt;" [Amos ix. 13.] that
243 is, with God's marvellous grace, whereby He gives us gifts new and wonderful.

244 And the prophet Isaiah: "In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a
245 feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on
246 the lees well refined." And again: "Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for
247 thine enemies, and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou
248 hast laboured; but they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord, and they

249 that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of My holiness." And again:
250 "Behold My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold My servants shall drink,
251 but ye shall be thirsty." [Isa. xxv. 6; lxii. 8, 9; lxxv. 13.]

252 Again: the prophet Jeremiah says: "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and
253 shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and
254 for the young of the flock and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden,
255 and they shall not sorrow any more at all ... And I will satiate the soul of the priests with
256 fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the Lord." [Jer. xxxi.
257 12-14.]

258 And the prophet Zechariah: "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!
259 corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids." [Zech. ix. 17.]

260 And under a different image, but with the same general sense, the prophet Malachi:
261 "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My Name shall be
262 great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My Name,
263 and a pure offering, for My Name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of
264 Hosts." [Mal. i. 11.]

265 Further, if the Psalms are intended for Christian worship, as surely they are, the
266 Prophetic Spirit, who inspired them, saw that they too would in various places describe
267 that sacred Christian feast, which we feel they do describe; and surely we may rightly
268 call this coincidence between the ordinance in the Christian Church and the form of
269 words in the Psalms, a mark of design. For instance: "Thou shalt prepare a Table before
270 me against them that trouble me. Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my Cup
271 shall be full." "I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord, and so will I go to Thine Altar."
272 "O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me, and bring me unto Thy holy
273 hill, and to Thy dwelling; and that I may go unto the Altar of God, even unto the God of
274 my joy and gladness." "The children of men shall put their trust under the shadow of Thy
275 wings. They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of Thy house, and Thou shalt give
276 them drink of Thy pleasures as out of the river. For with Thee is the well of life, and in
277 Thy light shall we see light." "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and receivest
278 unto Thee; he shall dwell in Thy court, and shall be satisfied with the pleasures of Thy
279 house, even of Thy Holy Temple." "My soul shall be satisfied, even as it were with
280 marrow and fatness, when my mouth praiseth Thee with joyful lips ... because Thou
281 hast been my helper, therefore under the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." [Ps. xxiii.
282 5; xxvi. 6; xxxvi. 7-9; xliii. 3, 4; lxxv. 4; lxxiii. 6-8.]

283 The same wonderful feast is put before us in the book of Proverbs, where Wisdom
284 stands for Christ. "Wisdom hath builded her house," that is, Christ has built His Church;
285 "she hath hewn out her seven pillars, she hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her
286 wine (that is, Christ has prepared His Supper), she hath also furnished her table (that is,
287 the Lord's Table), she hath sent forth her maidens (that is, the priests of the Lord), she
288 crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither; as for
289 him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of My Bread and drink of

290 the Wine which I have mingled," [Prov. ix. 1-5.]—which is like saying, "Come unto Me all
291 ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you." Like which are the prophet
292 Isaiah's words: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no
293 money, come ye buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without
294 price." [Isa. lv. 1.] And such too is the description in the book of Canticles: "The fig tree
295 putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell" ...
296 "Until the day break and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,
297 and to the hill of frankincense" ... "I have gathered My myrrh with My spice, I have eaten
298 My honeycomb with My honey, I have drunk My wine with My milk; eat, O friends, drink,
299 yea drink abundantly, O beloved!" [Cant. ii. 13; iv. 6; v. 1.] In connexion with such
300 passages as these should be observed St. Paul's words, which seem from the
301 antithesis to be an allusion to the same most sacred Ordinance: "Be not drunk with
302 wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit," with that new wine which God the
303 Holy Spirit ministers in the Supper of the Great King. God grant that we may be able
304 ever to come to this Blessed Sacrament with feelings suitable to the passages which I
305 have read concerning it! May we not regard it in a cold, heartless way, and keep at a
306 distance from fear, when we should rejoice! May the spirit of the unprofitable servant
307 never be ours, who looked at his lord as a hard master instead of a gracious benefactor!
308 May we not be in the number of those who go on year after year, and never approach
309 Him at all! May we not be of those who went, one to his farm, another to his
310 merchandise, when they were called to the wedding! Nor let us be of those, who come
311 in a formal, mechanical way, as a mere matter of obligation, without reverence, without
312 awe, without wonder, without love. Nor let us fall into the sin of those who complained
313 that they have nothing to gather but the manna, wearying of God's gifts.

314 But let us come in faith and hope, and let us say to ourselves, May this be the beginning
315 to us of everlasting bliss! May these be the first-fruits of that banquet which is to last for
316 ever and ever; ever new, ever transporting, inexhaustible, in the city of our God!