

The Bread of the Face

Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-9; 1 Samuel 21:1-6; Leviticus 7:11-15; Psalm 50

What We Found

We walked into Israel's sanctuary and found a table. Among the first furniture God commanded for his own house: acacia and pure gold, with bread set before his face always, and flagons and bowls for wine beside it. The bread's Hebrew name says what it is for: *lechem happanim*, bread of the face.

The rite of Leviticus 24 gave us the details: twelve loaves for twelve tribes, renewed every Sabbath, a covenant for ever, and the retired loaves eaten by priests in a holy place. At the heart of Israel's worship there is a weekly communion meal in the presence of God. We also watched David, anointed but hunted, receive that holy bread from a priest and share it with his companions.

Then the *todah*: Israel's thanksgiving sacrifice, offered with bread and eaten the same day, a sacrifice designed to become a feast. And Psalm 50 gave us God's own verdict on worship: he does not eat bulls; he asks for a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The Greek world would later say thanksgiving in one word: *eucharistia*. We kept the word.

Voices of the Church

St. Bede the Venerable

On the Tabernacle, 8th century

St. Bede, writing a book-length meditation on Israel's sanctuary, lingered over the golden table and its loaves. He read the bread kept perpetually before the Lord as a figure of the unfailing nourishment God provides his people, and in the twelve loaves he saw the whole people of God, no tribe missing, standing represented in God's presence as bread.

St. Augustine of Hippo

The City of God, Book 10

St. Augustine taught that God has no need of anything we offer; the sacrifice God seeks is the one that unites the offerer to him. True sacrifice, he wrote, is every work done in order to cling to God in holy fellowship. The animal on the altar was always a sign; the reality is a heart given in thanksgiving, and a people made one in the giving.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Mystagogical Catecheses, 4th century

St. Cyril, walking the newly baptized through the Church's worship, paused over its opening dialogue: lift up your hearts, let us give thanks to the Lord. It is truly right, he taught, to give

thanks, for God has called us, reconciled us, and given us everything we bring; before we offer anything at his table, we first answer his gifts with gratitude.

Live It This Week

- 1.** Keep a running thanksgiving list this week: one deliverance or gift written down each day. On the last day, read the list aloud to God as your *today*.
- 2.** Host or organize one deliberately grateful meal this week, even a small one, where at some point you say out loud what you are thankful for and why. Invite someone who was not at the last one.
- 3.** Pray Psalm 50 once this week, slowly, and let verses 12 to 15 recalibrate what you think God wants from you.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High."

Psalm 50:14

Before Next Session

Read Proverbs 9:1-6 and Isaiah 25:6-9. One is an invitation, the other is a menu. Notice who is invited to each.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1328; 1334