



Read the account of the manna from Heaven in Exodus.

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not....I have heard the murmurings of the sons of Israel; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat."

—Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

Imagine that you are one of the Israelites. How do you feel at the beginning of the story? How do you feel when God sends the manna?

The Israelites call the bread from Heaven *manna*, which comes from the Hebrew phrase for "What is it?" It is something new and miraculous, which no one has ever seen before. But after forty years of receiving it, the novelty wears off and the Israelites become so unappreciative that they complain, "We loathe this worthless food" (Numbers 21:5).

The manna is a prefiguration of the Eucharist. The fulfillment is always greater than what came before—as beautiful and amazing as the miracle of the manna was, the Eucharist is still greater. The Eucharist is humble and familiar. The miracle is veiled from our senses, and so it can be easy to take it for granted and miss its incredible sweetness, as the Israelites came to do with the manna.

Consider the following meditation on the manna from the Wisdom of Solomon. This book, written in the second century BC to encourage the Jews living in Alexandria to remain faithful to God's covenant, offers a profound reflection on this miracle.



*Instead of [destruction] you gave your people the food of angels,
and without their toil you supplied them from heaven with bread ready to eat,
providing every pleasure and suited to every taste.
For your sustenance manifested your sweetness toward your children;
and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it,
was changed to suit every one's liking.*

—Wisdom of Solomon 16:20–21

What stands out to you in the passage? How does it apply to the Eucharist even more than to the manna?

The manna is the bread for the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. The Eucharist is our bread for the journey to Heaven—and so one of its names is *viaticum*, Latin for “provision for the journey.” This name has come to be used exclusively for the Eucharist when it is given to someone who is near death. *Viaticum* is provision for the final step of the journey to our Promised Land, the “seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection” (CCC 1524). On every step of the journey, the Eucharist is our daily bread, our sustenance, and our source of every grace and blessing.

Take some time in prayer to thank God for the gift of the Eucharist, and to ask him to help you grow in your love for this sacrament.

*“O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I would like to be filled with love for You;
keep me closely united with You, may my heart be near to Yours.”*

—Pope Saint John XXIII