*Mindful of God in our past, and hopeful for God in the future, we live with God in the present.*

My family and I moved to Texas in 2000 and, being a California heathen, I had a lot to learn. The Houstonians were appalled that I had never read *Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry’s 1985 Pulitzer prize winning novel. The two protagonists of *Lonesome Dove* are Augustus “Gus” McCrae and W.F. Call, two Texas Rangers who drive a mostly-stolen herd of cattle to Montana. As they leave the small town of Lonesome Dove, Gus is heartbroken to leave behind his beloved sourdough starter, which he had kept alive for ten years to make their daily biscuits. This small event caught my attention. In my childhood near San Francisco, my family kept a batch of sourdough starter in a round yellow Tupperware bowl above the refrigerator. We used it to make round, cross-hatched loaves of sourdough bread. It is possible to create a batch of starter from scratch: mix some flour, water, and yeast and let it ferment for a few days. When it is time to bake bread, take a portion of that starter, fold it into your dough to make it rise, and carefully replace what was taken with more flour and water: that keeps the starter going and provides for future breadmaking. While that method is sufficient, the best sourdough starter is not made—it is inherited, passed forward from previous generations. The San Francisco Boudin bakery received their starter from the original gold-mining 1849’ers and have kept it going ever since. Sourdough starter, therefore, is a mystical thing: is combines an inherited past, a promised future, and an enjoyable present. In Lonesome Dove, Gus mourns the loss of his sourdough starter in the present because he has lost a connection with fond memories of past meals and anticipations of future meals. In a small but important way, he becomes just a little lost and adrift. We all know that life’s meaning is found in mindfulness of the past, hope for the future, and fully living in the present.

Bread plays a mystical role in today’s Gospel reading. A crowd of over 5,000 people follow Jesus and His Apostles up a mountain in the wilderness to listen to Him and to ask Him to heal their sick. At suppertime, Jesus asks His disciples to feed the crowd which, of course, they cannot. They protest that even if they had six months’ wages to buy the bread, they could not give each person even a little to eat. And where would they get it? All they have is a boy’s personal, two-day supply: five loaves and two fish. Jesus takes it, gives thanks for it, breaks it, and distributes enough until everyone is full. Seeing this miraculous sign, the people recognize that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah—the prophet who will deliver Israel from her captivity to her enemies. Mistakenly seeing Him as a national, political, and martial leader, they surge toward Him to make Him king. He flees to be by Himself; He understands Himself; He is not a king but a sacrifice whose death and resurrection would liberate and redeem all mankind.

The crowd’s response is understandable: they bread they received from Jesus has a mystical impact: it merges their mindfulness of the past, their hopes for the future, and their celebration in the present. They remember their past and how the great hero Moses, in their wilderness journey to the Promised Land, gave them manna: the bread from heaven. Therefore, Jesus reminds them of Moses. They also remember their promised future described in a prophecy that, after the Messiah had conquered their enemies, he would provide a celebratory feast. Isaiah writes, “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow of well-aged wines strained clear (Is. 25:6).” Therefore, they hope that Jesus is the Messiah who would lead them to their future. This mingling of past history and future promise give them joy in the present: they intuit that God is present with and actively working for and among them. They are mindful of God in their past, hopeful for God in their future, and feel alive with God in the present.

We have come to church today to receive another kind of mystical bread: the consecrated Bread of the Eucharist. In it, Christ is truly but mysteriously present. In this Bread, we are re-centered on our historic past, our future hope, and our present joy:

* We remember our past. Like the Jewish crowd that followed Jesus to the mountain, we are mindful of how God has acted in the past to save them—and, also, to save us. From time to time, we are given brief glimpses of how God has intervened to change our lives for the better: providing for us in a time of need, leading us through a painful event, delivering us from a time of loss, or giving a crucial a blessing just in time. We remember the 2,000-year-old sacrifice that Christ has made on the Cross to free us from self-centeredness, guilt, and life without God. We remember how the Holy Eucharist has been celebrated time and after time ever since all around the world, all in remembrance of His death for love of us.
* We rediscover hope. Like that Jewish crowd, we also know the promise of the future. Our daily circumstances may be uncertain, but have a certain hope that God intends and works for our ultimate good. As certain as our death is, we are certain that death is not the end, that separation from family, friends, and God Himself is not our destiny; that Resurrection, transformation, and reunion with all whom we have loved and lost and with God Himself awaits as surely as the rising of the sun.
* We come alive in the present. Like that Jewish crowd, our memories of our past and our hope for our future leavens and ferments our understanding that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).” In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask the Father for “our daily bread.” We ask Him to provide what we need in the present. That Greek phrase translated as “daily bread,” *arton* *epiousion*, can have a second meaning. In fact, St. Jerome, who in the 4th century translated the Greek New Testament into Latin, interpreted that same phrase two different ways: In Luke’s Gospel he called it “daily bread” or “needed bread;” in St. Matthew’s Gospel, he called *it* “supernatural bread,” ”bread from above,” “living bread.” These two translations are not contradictory; they are one and the same. In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask the Father for everything we need every day and we ask for the supernatural, living Bread that came down from Heaven: Jesus Himself. In other words, we ask the Father to show us Jesus daily: to keep us mindful of what He has done for us in the past, to keep us hopeful for what He promises in the future, and to keep us fully aware of His living Presence today, in the present, in his Body and Blood at the Altar and in His Body, which is the Church, which is us. Our daily bread is Jesus Himself, Who we will receive today. Here. In just a few moments. Together.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. A little sourdough starter raises the whole loaf. A little bit of Jesus, even just a fraction of His Body and Blood in the Bread and the Wine, re-centers, restores, and revives our mindfulness of God in the past, our hope for God in the future, and our life with God in the present. And so, let’s eat.