“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” Christ feeds 5,000+ people and insists on gathering up the bread into baskets. Why? Consider the background of baskets— for example Moses, through whom the twelve tribes of Israel were rescued from Egyptian slavery, was himself rescued in a basket. In the ordination of priests in Exodus 29, God commanded a basket be used to present the unleavened bread used for the “wave offering.” Accompanied by the blood of the ram, the unleavened bread for the peace offering was lifted up. They made the sign of the cross with it, and then had a Communion meal with God at the door of the Tabernacle. Whatever wasn’t eaten was burned with fire— there were to be no leftovers. God also spoke in Jeremiah six of the gathering of the remnant of all Israel in baskets. Now twelve baskets are left over from the original five loaves. Twelve is the number connected with the tribes of Israel, as five is connected with the Torah, the five books of Moses at the core of Israel’s identity. Since 721 BC ten of the tribes were lost, divided and scattered throughout the world by the Assyrians. Yet God, through the prophets, said He
would regather them. This is what gathering the twelve baskets is about.

Now Jesus’ first bread miracle- the feeding of the 5,000-also takes place at Passover time. Jesus tells the people to recline on the grass, which is a distinctly Passover posture. The verbs describing Jesus’ action are also connected to Passover: He takes bread, He gives thanks, He breaks and gives out, which is the meaning of the verb rendered “distributed” in the *Authorized Version*. He follows this with His sermon declaring Himself the Bread of Life. He says, “Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you.” When almost everyone abandons Him because of this, Jesus then gathers another crowd and feeds the 4,000+. He shows that He will gather all the peoples from the four corners of the world.

God was fulfilling what He said through Ezekiel: “As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered… I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel… they shall lie down …and feed in rich pasture”.

All of today’s Gospel’s details, of which there are many more, show us God acts in Covenant faithfulness. He gathers and cares for His one Family, the Church. He draws back to Himself the scattered, lost people of all nations, spread first at Babel, then at the fall of the Northern Kingdom. People of every tribe and nation and people and language are called home, including now you and me.

So we are brought today to His altar; we are fed with Christ, the Living Bread. The risen, glorified, and life-giving Flesh and blood of God is placed into you and me. God’s life, the divine fire once enthroned on the cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant, the burning coal from God’s altar that burned away the sins of Isaiah now burns away our sins, and makes us whole. In our journey through the desert of Lent, in our walk with Jesus through death to resurrection, we who are gathered are also made instruments of gathering, so none are lost, no human life is wasted, no one perishes. Christ Himself says to us: I Myself am your food. I fill you completely, to superabundance, to overflowing. My life is given into yours. I draw you to Myself. And in you I also issue My call to the
scattered and lost: come to the divine love which alone is genuine life. Come to My Feast, to share in My life.

*In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✡ and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*