

Scripture Study

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Proverbs 9:1-6

(Psalm 34:2-7)

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Overview of the Gospel:

- We return to the setting of the readings for the last three Sundays—the synagogue at Capernaum. The Passover is near and it is a year before Good Friday.
- We start with the verse we ended with last Sunday (John 6:51). The crowd has realized that Jesus is speaking not in metaphor, but literally (this is *in contrast* to Nicodemus—John 3:4—and the Samaritan woman at the well—John 4:11—who started out thinking literally and then were corrected by Jesus to think spiritually).
- In their minds he is talking about cannibalism and blood drinking—both personally repulsive and accursed under the Jewish Law (see Deuteronomy 28:53; Leviticus 17:10-14), as well as being an existing term of abuse that meant to slander and revile someone (Psalm 27:2).
- The Greek term rendered “will live forever” in verse 58 only appears here and in Genesis 3:22. This implies a connection between the Eucharist (the Bread of Life) and the Tree of Life in paradise. Missing in the crowd’s understanding of Jesus’ words, then, is that the life he will give through his body (see Hebrews 10:5-10) and blood (on the cross *and* in the Eucharist) is eternal—*spiritual*—life.

Questions:

- The setting for Jesus’ discourse on the Eucharist is in the synagogue on the Jewish feast of Passover. Why are each of these conditions significant?
- What is the crowd’s reaction to Jesus’ statement of verse 51? How does Jesus respond? Read verse 52. Do you think the Jews thought Jesus was speaking in a symbolic or metaphorical sense? Why or why not? What would you have thought?
- Compare verse 53 with the words of Jesus at the institution of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Mark 14:22-25). How are these words similar and a fulfillment of John 6: 53-56? What is required for one to be raised on the Last Day?
- What promise does Jesus make in verse 54? What kind of authority must someone have to make such a promise—and be able to keep it?
- How might the old adage “You are what you eat” apply to this passage? Of what are we to become partakers of (see 2 Peter 1:4)? In verse 56, how do we abide in Christ (cf. John 15: 1-10)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 787, 1331, 1355, 1381, 1391, 2837

Closing prayer

Obey your bishop and clergy with undivided mind...Share in one common breaking of bread [Eucharist]—the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore. - St. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 35—107)

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"He who eats this bread will live forever"

Scripture: John 6:51-58

[Jesus said] I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

Meditation: Why did Jesus offer himself as "food and drink" (John 6:53)? The Jews were scandalized and the disciples were divided when Jesus said "unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you." What a hard saying, unless you understand who Jesus is and why he calls himself the *bread of life*. The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (John 6:1-15), when Jesus said the blessing, broke and distributed



the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigured the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. The Gospel of John has no account of the Last Supper meal (just the foot washing ceremony and Jesus' farewell discourse). Instead, John quotes extensively from Jesus' teaching on the bread of life.

In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to their Creator. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine, who was both priest and king (Genesis 14:18), prefigured the offering made by Jesus, our high priest and king. The remembrance of the manna in the wilderness recalled to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3). When at the Last Supper Jesus described his blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28), he was explaining his coming crucifixion as a sacrifice for sins. His death on the cross fulfilled the sacrifice of the

paschal lamb. That is why John the Baptist called him the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*" Jesus made himself an offering and sacrifice, a gift that was truly pleasing to the Father. He "*offered himself without blemish to God*" (Hebrews 9:14) and "*gave himself as a sacrifice to God*" (Ephesians 5:2).

Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum—giving his disciples his body and his blood. Jesus' passing over to his Father by his death and resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Last Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the church in the glory of God's kingdom. When the Lord Jesus commands his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood, he invites us to take his life into the very center of our being. That life which he offers is the very life of God himself. Do you hunger for the *bread of life*?

"Lord Jesus, you nourish and sustain us with your very own presence and life. You are the bread of life—the bread that sustains us now and that produces everlasting life in us. May I always hunger for you and be satisfied in you alone."

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