

I am the bread of life! (from the Pastor)

Over the next five weeks at Mass, we will be hearing the priest or deacon proclaim the Gospel containing one of the most important chapters of the Bible for our Catholic life: St. John, chapter 6. This is the story of Jesus' own teaching to the earliest Christian disciples of the meaning of the Eucharist, the sacrament that we are extraordinarily privileged to receive each and every Sunday, the sacrament that gives to us the very Body and Blood of Jesus Himself. It is one of the longest quotations of Jesus in the entire Bible, because it is so important. In fact, Jesus repeats His points in the Gospel over and over, to make absolutely certain that the people understand.

I highly recommend that you read this chapter over in your Bible at home at least once sometime over the next few weeks so that you can reflect on how important it is to your own life. It won't take long to read through – less than 10 minutes – but you will want to read it slowly and come back to it several times. I'll be preaching and writing about it as well.

We will hear the whole chapter, with just a few verses left out, broken down as follows.

- Today, July 29th. Verses 1-15. Jesus performs the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish as a special sign.
- August 5th. Verses 24-35. Jesus contrasts the ancient sign of manna falling from heaven to feed the Jewish people in the desert to the new Bread of Life. The people demand, "Give us this bread always," and Jesus responds with the astonishing words, "I am the bread of life!"
- August 12th. Verses 41-51. The people are very skeptical about Jesus' claim, but Jesus "doubles down" on the truth of His words and teaches that receiving the Bread of Life is the way to eternal life.
- August 19th. Verses 51-58. Jesus continues to teach that His flesh and blood is food for the life of the world, and that His Body is true food and His blood is true drink.
- August 26th. Verses 60-69. Jesus concludes His teaching and reminds people that the Spirit gives life. That is, this Bread from Heaven is far more important than any food we eat to nourish our bodies. Many of the people simply can't accept this teaching and so they walk away in disbelief. Jesus' disciples are confused and probably tempted to walk away, too, but Peter, the first pope, professes His faith in Jesus and the truth of His words, telling Jesus that He believes He is the Messiah and the Son of God.

So just a very brief reflection on today's reading on the multiplication of the loaves and fish: We see today this astonishing miracle where Jesus takes a few measly scraps of fish and bread and transforms them so that they are enough to feed a huge crowd of 5,000 men and their families, with 12 giant baskets left over.

What is the meaning of this? First, we remember that Jesus always performed miracles for a specific reason, having to do with increasing people's faith, never just to show off His divine power. St. John calls them "signs," reminding us that they point to something greater than what meets the eye. Clearly, Jesus intended this miracle not just to be hospitable to a hungry crowd, but to show them what He would do until the very end of time, beginning with the Last Supper (the first Mass). He would miraculously provide food, not just for 5,000 men, but for the whole world, by His divine power. In fact, He "multiplies" His divine presence each and

every day, wherever there is a priest to celebrate Mass, so that over a billion Catholics can receive His Body and Blood.

And that is what the rest of the chapter is about: explaining just what kind of “food” this Body and Blood of Holy Communion truly is. Stay tuned. For more reflections, P.J. and I will also be giving you some references from the “Formed” online video series that go into a little more depth.