

## Bread for the Life of the World (from the Pastor)

Through the month of August, I am going to continue to reflect on St. John's Gospel, chapter 6. That is the Gospel proclaimed at Mass for several weeks running, containing Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist, the core of our Christian life. Today we hear vv. 41-51, where some of the crowd who are listening to Jesus teach and preach begin to turn on him and express skepticism of His power to give them the true bread of life.

It is interesting to note just what they complain about, because human nature doesn't change much over the years. As Jesus begins to reveal the extraordinarily good news that He is indeed the true bread come down from Heaven and that He has the power to give them this priceless divine gift, many in the crowd begin to scoff at this. "'How can He say this? Do we not know His father and mother [Joseph and Mary]?" In other words, they can't believe He could be the True Bread from Heaven because He seems so ordinary to them. In their eyes, He is just a common man from Nazareth, born of ordinary parents –very humble, even poor ones at that. If He were really able to give them so great a gift, He would have already dazzled them with His power and majesty. They are looking for glitz and glitter.

To this day, it is very similar. Many people stop coming to holy Mass—the only place where we can truly receive the Bread of Life from Heaven -- because it is "boring" or "repetitive." They don't realize that Jesus works to reveal His divine majesty in very subtle, humble, often hidden, ways. Instead, they want an "experience." Many of our former Catholics start turning away to go to churches where there is more excitement, more buzz., where things might seem a little more entertaining. We have certainly seen a lot of these churches crop off over the last ten to twenty years.

Interestingly, when they leave the Church, they will often use the buzz words, "I'm not being fed." That often really means that the Mass is not emotionally engaging to them, or the preaching doesn't get them fired up. But this is really an astonishing thing to say. At the Holy Mass, as we'll soon find out in upcoming verses of this Gospel passage, we are fed with the true Body of Christ and His true Blood. We eat and drink the true flesh and blood of the One Who gives us eternal life, eternal fulfillment, eternal happiness, blissful Communion with the Holy Trinity. Through this participation at the Eucharist, we enter into the depths of the mystery of Christ surrendering His Body and Blood on the Cross for the salvation of the world and for an unbounded love for each of us individually.

*Not being fed?!* What more could one possibly ask for to be "fed" with? If one truly believes in the words and promises of Our Lord (that He is truly the Bread from Heaven), then we learn that nothing else on earth – no matter how entertaining, glamorous, or glitzy – could ever be greater food for the heart and soul.

This is what Jesus keeps hammering at as he tries to bring His people to faith: "I am the bread of life, whoever believes this has eternal life." He contrasts being fed with food for the body vs. this food for the soul. "Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died, but this is the bread that comes down from Heaven, so that one may eat it and not die."

In other words, the miraculous feeding in the desert the Lord provided for the Jews escaping the cruel slavery of Pharaoh was just a sign of something far greater to come. Not just food to strengthen and nourish the body, but the very food of being united to God Himself and entering into Communion with Him.

As Catholic families, we should constantly be reminding our families of how absolutely precious a gift this is, and how to approach the Lord in the Eucharist with deep gratitude and devotion. We should be training our children and grandchildren to deepen their knowledge of and love for the Holy Eucharist so that they never walk away from this greatest of gifts.