

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sun OT – August 19, 2018 – Bread of Life Discourse, Part IV

As a reminder of our theme here, for the entire month of August, the Church proclaims the Gospel from St. John, chapter 6, “the Bread of Life” discourse – Jesus’ very own teaching on the Eucharist. This is such a core and important teaching that we reflect on the whole chapter for five weeks running. I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that if we don’t make an effort to understand this properly, the whole foundation for our Catholic faith is on very, very shaky ground.

So I am encouraging you to read this chapter at home, to look at our parish website for more resources, and to use the free online videos and resources that we will be providing for you to spend a little more time with this.

I’ve preached in recent weeks about the Church’s teaching on *transubstantiation*, to use the technical term, the \$10 word. It means that, the moment the priest says the words of consecration during Mass, the bread and wine offered as gifts cease to be bread and wine. If you’re wondering why the altar servers ring the bell, it is to highlight the importance of this very moment. At that very moment, the “substance” – again, the technical term – the “stuff” of bread and wine – ceases to exist. Where the bread and wine used to be, now there is truly present – not just symbolically – the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, Who died to give us life and to surrender to us His very flesh and blood. So we call what used to be bread “the Sacred Host” or “the Precious Body” of Jesus and what used to be wine “the Precious Blood” of Jesus.

Why can’t we see it as it is then? The Church Fathers teach us that, because of our weak human sensibilities, we would be revolted by eating what looked like flesh and blood, so the Lord condescends to allow the senses to perceive it as something more suitable to what we are used to eating. But still, it is truly the Body and Blood of Christ.

From the moment of consecration, until it no longer has the appearance of bread and wine. That is why we very carefully and reverently collect the consecrated bread and wine after the Communion rite and place the Hosts in the tabernacle, where Jesus dwells. And consume all of the Precious Blood. That is why any Catholic Church around the world is a very special place to pray. It is different than praying at home, in a church hall or basement, or out in nature: Because Jesus *dwells there*. We *should* be in the habit of stopping by a Catholic Church to pray, even outside of Mass time. Unfortunately, for security, many churches lock their doors. So I will be working on ways to keep the church open for our parishioners to pray. In the meantime, whenever our parish office is open, you can ask the parish staff or volunteers to let you in to pray.

But back to the Gospel. Our Lord says, unmistakably clearly, and repeating himself multiple times for emphasis, that He wants us to physically receive His Body and Blood into our bodies. He wants us to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Some Christians say this is only symbolic. That it is like a parable, a symbolic story with a message. But that just doesn’t make any sense. When Jesus told parables, He made it clear to His audience that it *was* a parable. It was always in “story form” – ‘there was a man who had a son....’ This is different. Jesus isn’t in story mode, He is giving commands. Repeated commands. And using plain, non-symbolic language.

So what do His commands mean? “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.”

He is telling something absolutely extraordinary, but true. When we eat His Body and drink His blood, we share in the power of His crucifixion, death and Resurrection. That it is precisely in receiving Eucharist that Christ’s divine power overcomes the gravitational pull of sin and death. It is in receiving the Eucharist that we are saved, and – because of God’s goodness and mercy – can get to Heaven.

To put it even more astonishingly, as one of the Church Fathers says, “It is not merely the flesh of man but of god, and it makes man divine, by inebriating him, as it were, with divinity.” To put it even more starkly and simply: without the Catholic priesthood and the Eucharist, no one could escape eternal damnation.

So it is by sharing properly in the Eucharist, we are connected to the divine power and love of Christ Himself. This inestimable gift is freely given out of love by Christ to all His faithful. But for so great a gift, we should be very, very careful how we receive it. Because the more precious the gift, the more grave the responsibility to use the gift properly. And there is no more precious gift than the Eucharist.

St. Augustine says the faithful receive the Body of Christ if they labor to *be* the Body of Christ. In other words, receiving the Eucharist requires a serious, serious commitment. To remain united to Christ, to follow His commandments, to follow the guidance of the Church, His Bride and our mother, to accept all that Christ teaches through His Church. If we are not willing to do *all* of this – not just part -- we should not receive Communion. That sounds startling in this day and age, where people talk about ‘welcoming’ and ‘inclusion’ as if it were just about being friendly. But it is what the Church has always taught.

Because receiving Communion is much deeper than just having a friendly gathering. The Church Fathers even remind us that if we don’t take receiving Communion seriously – such as being aware of serious sin and not confessing it first, we are causing spiritual harm to ourselves. It is something we should think and pray about.

What Jesus *wants* for us is eternal life and joyful Communion with Him. He gives us this most astounding and Precious Gift as that food for the journey, as Bread from Heaven. But it demands a response from us, more than just passively or automatically coming up in the Communion line.

Let us pray that, as we ponder this amazing gift of Christ’s real presence, we may act upon Our Lord’s words, so that we may receive worthily, reverently, and with profound gratitude the true flesh and true drink of Our Lord and Savior.

**Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Lectionary: 119**

**Reading 1**

**PRV 9:1-6**

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Wisdom has built her house,  
she has set up her seven columns;  
she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine,  
yes, she has spread her table.  
She has sent out her maidens; she calls  
from the heights out over the city:  
"Let whoever is simple turn in here;  
To the one who lacks understanding, she says,  
Come, eat of my food,  
and drink of the wine I have mixed!  
Forsake foolishness that you may live;  
advance in the way of understanding."

**Responsorial Psalm**

**PS 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7**

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R. (9a) **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall be ever in my mouth. ...

**Reading 2**

**EPH 5:15-20**

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Brothers and sisters:  
Watch carefully how you live,  
not as foolish persons but as wise,  
making the most of the opportunity,  
because the days are evil.  
Therefore, do not continue in ignorance,  
but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.  
And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery,  
but be filled with the Spirit,  
addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,  
singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts,  
giving thanks always and for everything  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

**Alleluia**

**JN 6:56**

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Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him, says the Lord.

## **Gospel**

JN 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven;  
whoever eats this bread will live forever;  
and the bread that I will give  
is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,  
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
has eternal life,

and I will raise him on the last day.

For my flesh is true food,  
and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me  
and I have life because of the Father,

so also the one who feeds on me  
will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died,  
whoever eats this bread will live forever."