

19th Sun OT – August 12, 2018 – Bread of Life Discourse, Part III

As a reminder for those who weren't at Mass last weekend, I am doing a series in preaching and in the bulletin columns about one of the most important Gospel passages we need to meditate on as Catholics and Christians: St. John, chapter 6. That's because, for every weekend in August, the Church proclaims this powerful Gospel at Mass, and breaks up this very long teaching of Jesus into bite-size chunks so we can begin to understand it little by little. The overall gist of the chapter is Jesus explaining how He will give us the gift of the Eucharist – not just for the disciples He's speaking to at the time, but for all Catholics until the end of time. He also explains how this is at the core of our life and our salvation. So pretty important to understand it.

To get what Jesus is saying, it's critical to understand that what Jesus gives us is not *something* but rather *someone*. That is, what Jesus gives us in the Bread of Life – in the Sacred Host and the holy Chalice – is not mere physical food, not just a token of His love, not merely a symbol – but Himself. It is God's love incarnate (in the flesh), the fullness of His very Divine Being in sacramental form.

We can count how many times that Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” *Ego sum panis vitae*. And if we really delve into a Scripture and language study, we find out that's not the best translation. Jesus is saying more, “It is I Myself Who am the Bread of Life.” The emphasis is on the *I*.

That is critically important. To be honest, it's something a lot of Catholics still don't understand. We come to Mass not to “get *something*” – but to receive *Someone* into our hearts, minds, bodies and souls. Or maybe better, to encounter Jesus Christ, the Living God, present on this altar, present in His living word, present in the priest who stands in the person of Christ, present above all in what is called the “Sacred Species,” the consecrated bread and wine which cease to be bread and wine but become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Incidentally, that is why there is such a difference between praying the Mass and bringing Communion to the sick and shut-in. Taking Communion to someone outside Mass is a good thing – there is still some grace given, certainly. But it's something done only when strictly necessary – because in that case, we don't encounter Christ the priest, making present the sacrifice of His Holy Cross, which happens every time a priest is present to celebrate the Mass.

This is such an astounding teaching that we shouldn't get jaded to it, or to used to it, or indifferent to it in any way. The only way we can truly understand it is to ask the Lord to open up our minds to the mystery. Because once we cease to believe that there is anything special about the Eucharist, that “what we see is what we get” – then we miss Our Savior's entire point:

When it comes to the Eucharist, there is far, far more than just what meets the eye.

If we are to celebrate the Holy Mass to full effect, then it is important to wrestle with this and to ask the Lord to increase our faith.

It is interesting that in the Gospel, we see what happens to those who refuse to do so. Jesus, the Son of God, chose to take on our humanity – to grow up in what seemed at first glance to be an ordinary family – to be what seemed on the surface an ordinary man. And so many of His people simply can't believe that this Jesus is truly the Son of God. They are saying in effect, we

can't believe there is anything special about this man. Anything different about this man. He is just an ordinary Joe. His dad was just a carpenter. His mother was just a villager from Nazareth. As far as what meets the eye, there is nothing special here. What could He possibly have to give us that someone else couldn't?

And if we really think about it, that is exactly the same mentality that many many people have about this gift of the Bread of Life. Sometimes, sadly, even Catholics. They might think – or act as if they believe – that the Mass is just a religious service, like any other. The bread and wine at Mass are just symbols. I knew that priest growing up and there wasn't anything special about him.

But Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ challenges us in love to go much, much deeper.

“Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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.”

We should almost memorize those words. They are a perpetual reminder to us that this holy Bread of Life is the gateway for us to eternal life and happiness with our Heavenly Father. That when we duly prepare ourselves to receive the Bread of Life at Mass, then, when we receive Him, we become more like Jesus, become holier, become transformed. We begin to understand more and more that our biological earthly life is not a goal in itself; it is a pilgrimage to the life of Heaven that Jesus wants for us. That the physical food we enjoy the most is as nothing compared to this Heavenly Food that we receive at this altar today.

All of this and more is the gift of Jesus, the Son of God, to us Who believe and line up our lives so that the Eucharist is the focus, the very center, the highlight of our day, the highlight of the week, the highlight of our whole life.

Let us pray for our families and our parish, that we may have the grace to do exactly that: to believe that Jesus Himself is the very Bread of Life; that with an astonishing love, He gives us the Bread of Life; that this Bread from Heaven is our most precious gift.

AUGUST 12, 2018

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 116

Reading 1

1 KGS 19:4-8

Elijah went a day's journey into the desert,
until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it.
He prayed for death saying:
"This is enough, O LORD!
Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers."
He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree,
but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat.
Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake
and a jug of water.
After he ate and drank, he lay down again,
but the angel of the LORD came back a second time,
touched him, and ordered,
"Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!"
He got up, ate, and drank;
then strengthened by that food,
he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.

Reading 2

EPH 4:30-5:2

Brothers and sisters:
Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.
All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling
must be removed from you, along with all malice.
And be kind to one another, compassionate,
forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love,
as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us
as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.

Gospel

[JN 6:41-51](#)

The Jews murmured about Jesus because he said,
"I am the bread that came down from heaven, "
and they said,
"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?
Do we not know his father and mother?
Then how can he say,
'I have come down from heaven?'"
Jesus answered and said to them,
"Stop murmuring among yourselves.
No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him,
and I will raise him on the last day.
It is written in the prophets:
They shall all be taught by God.
Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.
Not that anyone has seen the Father
except the one who is from God;
he has seen the Father.
Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever believes has eternal life.
I am the bread of life.
Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died;
this is the bread that comes down from heaven
so that one may eat it and not die.
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."