

21st Sun OT – August 26, 2018 – Bread of Life Discourse, Part V of V

Today we come to the end of the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus' very own teaching on the Eucharist and what it means to receive the Bread of Life at Mass. As a reminder, I have been devoting a lot of time to it recently, dwelling on it for these last 5 weeks where it came up in the Church's cycle of Mass readings, because it is so core to our Catholic faith and so important to understand it and get it right.

But as we wrap it up, I don't want to leave it behind completely. I've put resources up on our parish website, so you can spend time at your leisure. This includes my homily notes but also some great free videos you can watch online. Please check that out at ccc.city.

As we come to the conclusion of the story, there is something we should really focus on: the **teaching on the Eucharist is shocking**. I'll say that again. 2x. At some level, if we are really taking our faith seriously, we should be utterly surprised, even shocked, at the truth of what Jesus is saying. Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of the universe, through Whom all things were created comes to us under the form of Bread. Jesus, Our Savior and Lord, is so astonishingly humble, that He gives us His own flesh and blood to eat, that He comes to us in the appearance of what looks like food and drink.

The line in the Gospel stands out after Jesus tells the people that they must eat His Body and drink His blood to have eternal life. They complain – loudly – that this teaching is too hard to accept. What is Jesus' response? **Not**, don't worry about it. It's not a big deal. **Not**, don't worry about it, I'm just speaking symbolically, **not** do what you want, as long as you pray your own way, it will be OK. No. Quite the opposite. Jesus doubles down and asks the people outright, *Does this shock you? The Word of God is Spirit and Life.*

In other words, Jesus recognizes, I *know* this seems shocking. I *know* this seems hard to believe. But it's true. Furthermore, to have true life in God, to have that relationship with God that you are hungering for, you have to wrestle with this hard teaching, come to grips with it, ask me to help you understand, that the way to have the fullness of life, true life within you, is through the receiving of my Body and Blood. By being united to me in the Eucharist.

Look at what happens in this passage. The ones who have weak faith, want to meet Jesus on their own terms and not His – they just walk away. So much so that Jesus asks Peter and the men He called to be His Apostles, Do you want to walk away too?

And Peter answers him what we all hope that we can answer. “Where else would we possibly go? We have come to believe that you have the words of eternal life. We are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” In other words – as hard as it is to wrap our minds and hearts around this truth – we know that it *is* the truth. ***Because You Yourself reveal it to us.***

Let's stop a minute and ask ourselves what this all means for us. The first question that we have to ask ourselves is, do we take this seriously? After all, there is more than one way to “walk away.” One is by simply not coming to Mass. That's a problem, of course. And a growing problem, especially among the young. Doesn't take much to see when we look around that not many of our young people are coming to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus.

But another way of “walking away” from the teaching about Jesus' Body and Blood is by coming to Mass, but not really receiving the Eucharist as if we truly believe it is Jesus' Body and Blood.

I'll be honest. I am not much of a fan of the way our bishops have instructed us to receive Communion. Walking up in a line, placing it in our hands. I am just old enough to remember when the bishops instructed us to receive Communion at an altar rail, on our knees. I think people "got it" back then, just Who it was that they were receiving. So we have to make much more of an effort now, since the visual sign is not there, to remind ourselves what we are about.

One Catholic speaker I know told this story: He was a convert, actually a Protestant minister. And so he tried to get a lot of his Protestant friends to accept the Catholic faith and her teaching on the Eucharist. He had one guy on the hook. He was close, but couldn't quite make the leap.

Why not? Because he visited a Catholic Church once and observed how people received Holy Communion. He saw a lot of people not the least bit prayerful, chewing gum, walking out the door the minute they received without praying in thanksgiving, and so on. And because of that poor witness, he said he just couldn't believe. His response: "If I believed what you Catholics say you believe about the Eucharist, I would crawl on my knees to that altar and beg God to make me worthy to receive!"

That's a challenge to us. If we can re-cover that spirit of true humility before Our Eucharistic Lord, true belief in what Jesus is saying here, than that faith will attract lots more people to the Catholic Church. Which is of course what Jesus wants. He doesn't want anyone to walk away. But the corollary of that is that we can't be shy about this. The Apostles gave their lives to teach about the Mass and the sacraments. Some of us aren't even willing to talk to friends or family or co-workers about what the Bread of Life means to us. We need to change that! I will do what I can, including making changes to the placement of the tabernacle so it's more obvious how important it is – but you have to do your part as well.

Something else I want to address from this Gospel, although I wish I didn't have to. There is a line that should almost send a chill up our spine. **Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and who would betray him.** Jesus knew that He would reveal the greatest truth and mystery of His love – that the fullness of His love would be given to us in the Holy Eucharist – and that despite that sacrifice of the Cross, despite His staggering humility toward us – that some given this greatest gift would still betray Him. We know, above all, that Judas Iscariot, the man called to be an Apostle, to share in the first Mass, was foremost among these betrayers.

Human nature hasn't changed, and we see that still happening in the Church. Some priests and bishops and even former cardinals – given the greatest gift imaginable of bringing the saving Body and Blood of Christ to the world – have betrayed Jesus in terrible ways, such as the abuse of young men. The faithful understandably feel angry, betrayed and confused. But Jesus *knew* this was going to happen. And it doesn't stop the holiness of the Eucharist. It doesn't stop the holy Mass from uniting us to Jesus. It should not rock our faith to know that there are a few betrayers among the men who the Lord called to be holy priests now just as there were at the beginning. Instead, it should motivate us to pray: to pray for the conversion and willingness to repent of all those who have committed grave evils or enabled grave evils in the past, so they are not permanently lost; to pray for the courage and wisdom of our bishops to take the appropriate steps to purify the Church, even if it means resigning from office; to pray that our bishops and seminary rectors take all of the steps necessary to continue to insure that only psychologically and spiritually healthy men are ordained to the holy priesthood; to pray that the good men currently in seminary do not get discouraged and continue to pursue holiness. One thing we

learn from studying Church history is that, when there are times of rot or corruption or in the Church, those are precisely the times when the Lord raises up great saints and reformers. We pray that it may be so now.

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 122

Reading 1

JOS 24:1-2A, 15-17, 18B

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem,
summoning their elders, their leaders,
their judges, and their officers.
When they stood in ranks before God,
Joshua addressed all the people:
"If it does not please you to serve the LORD,
decide today whom you will serve,
the gods your fathers served beyond the River
or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling.
As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

But the people answered,
"Far be it from us to forsake the LORD
for the service of other gods.
For it was the LORD, our God,
who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt,
out of a state of slavery.
He performed those great miracles before our very eyes
and protected us along our entire journey
and among the peoples through whom we passed.
Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Responsorial Psalm PS 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

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.
Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad. ...

Reading 2
EPH 5:21-32

Brothers and sisters:
Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.
For the husband is head of his wife
just as Christ is head of the church,
he himself the savior of the body.
As the church is subordinate to Christ,
so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.
Husbands, love your wives,
even as Christ loved the church
and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,
cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,
that he might present to himself the church in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.
So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
For no one hates his own flesh
but rather nourishes and cherishes it,
even as Christ does the church,
because we are members of his body.
*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.*
This is a great mystery,
but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

Alleluia
JN 6:63C, 68C

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**
Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.

Gospel
JN 6:60-69

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said,
"This saying is hard; who can accept it?"
Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this,
he said to them, "Does this shock you?
What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending
to where he was before?
It is the spirit that gives life,
while the flesh is of no avail.

The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.
But there are some of you who do not believe."
Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe
and the one who would betray him.
And he said,
"For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me
unless it is granted him by my Father."

As a result of this,
many of his disciples returned to their former way of life
and no longer accompanied him.
Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"
Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
We have come to believe
and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."