

19th August 2018 (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 33(34):2-3,10-15; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58.

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven.

As we continue reading chapter 6 of the gospel according to John, Jesus continues to remind us that he, not the manna the people of God ate in the desert, is the one true bread God gives us to eat. One cannot 'eat' without becoming deeply involved; when one eats one crushes the food and swallows it, allowing it becomes part of one's being. This 'eating and drinkin' metaphor is a clear image of our relationship with God through Jesus. We are invited to listen to God's Word, believe in Jesus and therefore both metaphorically and physically eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Jesus is the true bread come from the Father for us to eat: he is the Word of God become human flesh. When we engage with the Word of God, we are nourished; the Mass that we celebrate nourishes us equally at the table of the Word and at the table of Jesus' flesh and blood. Since the manna in the desert, like ourselves, was exclusively of this world, it could only nourish and give life related to this world. If we only eat food from this world – if we only listen to what this world has to tell us – we cannot have eternal life because that is not of this world!

Jesus invites us to eat / engage in / consume / believe in the food that has in it the life of God! Since Jesus has divine life within him, when we participate in him we also participate in the life of God and are born to the eternal life in God. (Within this context it is interesting to note that in the gospel according to Luke, Jesus is presented to the world in a feeding trough, as food to be eaten and consumed!)

Jesus is the outpouring of God's love on humanity. In Jesus, God invites us to engage with his divine life. This divine love that starts at the incarnation reaches its fulfilment on the cross when Jesus breaks his body and sheds his blood for the salvation of the world, for the salvation of all!

This is clearly Eucharistic language. One cannot separate faith in Jesus from engaging with God's Word and participating in the Eucharist; they are one and the same action presented to us in different forms. Similarly one cannot separate the actions of Holy Thursday from those on Good Friday. Jesus gave himself as a servant of all at the washing of the feet, then when he gave us his flesh and blood to consume, and when he was consumed on the altar of the cross. Everytime we reach out in service to our sisters and brothers and eat the flesh and blood at the Eucharist, we are also participating in Christ's dying on the cross!

Jews are prohibited from eating the flesh or drinking the blood of any living being because that would deprive the living being from its own life; in a Jewish context, living flesh and blood are representative of life. In the gospel according to John, Jesus insists that this is exactly what we are required to do: eat and drink his flesh and blood. Only thus can we make sure that we have the life of God within us and can be assured of eternal life. For the first readers of the gospel according to John, and so also for us, these are very clearly Eucharistic words. The Eucharist we share is true flesh and blood of the Lord, but, in the same context, the gospel according to John also invites us to engage and make our own God's Word in Jesus and a deep and personal faith in God. This way we truly eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of God.

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