

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 18 JUNE, 2017 **- Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ** (John 6:51-58)

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

Jesus said to the Jews:

'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied,

'I tell you most solemnly,
if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood
you will not have life in you.
Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood
has eternal life,
and I shall raise him up on the last day.
For my flesh is real food
and my blood is real drink.
He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
lives in me
and I live in him.
As I, who am sent by the living Father,
myself draw life from the Father,
so whoever eats me will draw life from me.
This is the bread come down from heaven;
not like the bread our ancestors ate:
they are dead,
but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

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These verses constitute the end of "the Bread of Life" discourse given at the synagogue at Capernaum. (Matthew 4:13 suggests it is Jesus' hometown as an adult). That Jesus delivers this address in his hometown makes it difficult for his audience to accept. How can this local boy, their neighbour make such outlandish claims? How can his father give them the true bread from heaven? They know his father as Joseph the carpenter, not a baker of heavenly bread!

There are constant references to Jewish tradition - recall Moses and the manna in the desert, now Jesus claims that the manna only sustained the people for a short time, but the bread who is Jesus will sustain a person forever. Note too the sacrificial language of the Torah. It requires ritual sacrifices of animals and how they are to be prepared. Some flesh is to be burnt, other flesh is to be eaten. The gift of one's flesh is the most personal of all sacrifices that a person can make on behalf of another. (John 15,13) This sacrificial language recalls John the Baptist's earlier reference to Jesus as "the Lamb of God"- this reminds us of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 11-12) and the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:13) who bore the sin of many.

The use of the word "blood" (v53) however, is not only repellent but offensive because Jews do not ingest the blood of an animal alongside its flesh (Gen 9.4). This could indicate the later audience as Jews and gentiles.

Many scholars see this passage as incarnational not eucharistic - noting that in accounts of the Lord's Supper "body" not "flesh" is used. "Flesh" brings to mind incarnation, (John 1,14), "The Word became flesh."

I think we can say that incarnational, sacrificial and eucharistic emphasis are intertwined. So it is appropriate that this Gospel passage is read at today's feast.

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1. When we believe in Jesus and partake of the Eucharist, he strengthens and sustains us in ways that nothing else can.
2. The manna in the wilderness and the loaves that feed 5000 were satisfying for a short time. The Bread who is Jesus is for eternal life.
3. Our participation at Mass, our gathering together for the Eucharist, is a public and viable witness of our faith in Jesus and our faith in one another.

Take home Message