

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 6:51

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven,
says the Lord;
whoever eats this bread will live forever.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:51-58; L167A

Jesus said to the

Jewish 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.

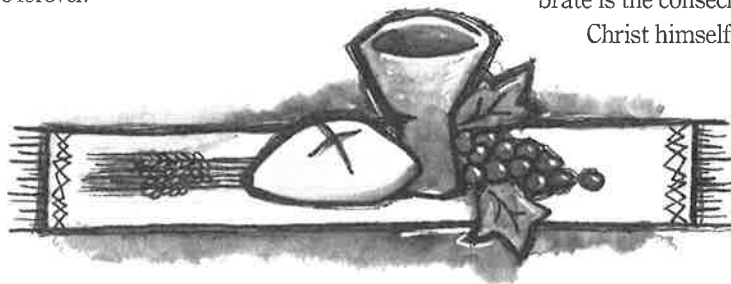
This is the bread that came down from
heaven.

Unlike your ancestors who ate and still
died,

whoever eats this bread will live
forever.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Following Holy Trinity Sunday last week, we now celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as Corpus Christi, which is Latin for “Body of Christ.” What the church intends to celebrate at this feast is not the corpse of Jesus on the cross, his body during his earthly ministry, or even the Pauline sense of the church itself as the body of Christ. Instead, as we can tell from the gospel reading, the church celebrates the presence of Christ in the eucharistic species. The Body and Blood of Christ we celebrate is the consecrated bread and wine that has become Christ himself.



The gospel reading today is not from the Last Supper as we might expect. Instead, the reading is from part of the “bread of life discourse” of the Gospel of John. The eucharistic theology is up-front and paramount. Jesus proclaims that he is the living bread come down

from heaven. And to be certain that his listeners understand, he states clearly that this is true food and true drink. The imagery is so stark that many stumble over this teaching. Still Jesus maintains that those who consume this bread will live forever.

Later theologians build on this to say that it is precisely because Christians consume the Eucharist that we have the hope of eternal life. The Eucharist is the guarantor or the seed of eternal life that will come to fruition on the last day. Irenaeus, for example, who flourished in the latter half of the second century, says that when we receive the Eucharist, our bodies are no longer corruptible but have the hope of the resurrection to eternity (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.18.5).

Thus, the church gives us this feast day to reflect on the sacramental life by which we participate in the divine life. Our consumption of the Eucharist is itself a promise of eternal life. But rather than a mere magical elixir, the Eucharist nourishes us so that we may live as followers of Jesus and emulate the life he led. By our reception of the Eucharist we, too, are called to become bread for the world and nourishment for those in need. The Eucharist is a call to Christian action.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The eucharistic species (the bread and the wine) is more than a thing to be reified; it is a eucharistic process, a self-giving of Christ himself so that he is bread broken and wine poured out in service and in love. It is not enough merely to admire the eucharistic species, though there is certainly a history of eucharistic adoration in our church, and it has a place. To truly celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, we must become an *alter Christus* (another Christ) in the midst of the world today, so that we are bread broken and wine poured out for the needs of humanity.

The challenge of the Eucharist is not about spending time in private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, though that is certainly good. Rather, the Eucharist demands that, as followers of Christ, we, too, allow ourselves to be broken for others, to be poured out. In so doing, we will be emulating Christ and living the paschal mystery.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: “[T]he bread that I will give / is my flesh for the life of the world.”

To the point: The bread Jesus offers is not only for the crowds that followed him in the land of Israel, or only for the disciples who heard his words at the Last Supper over the bread and wine. Its purpose is not limited to bringing the faithful into communion with him and with each other. Rather, this living bread sent down from heaven is meant for “the life of the world.” As those who are nourished at the table of the Lord, we must not hide this treasure away but instead, being the eucharistic people Christ has called us to be, take it out into the world to bless, heal, restore, and revive.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of how the Lord himself “fed you in the desert with manna.” After letting the people be “afflicted with hunger” to help them understand that “not by bread alone does one live,” God satisfies their hunger with manna. This miraculous food sustained the people through their forty years in the desert before entering the Promised Land. Now, in the gospels, Jesus proclaims that he, the incarnate Son of God, is “the living bread that came down from heaven.”

to experience: Where are you hungering in your spiritual life and how might God be calling you to feed that hunger?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Psalm 147 illustrates the abundant blessings the God of Israel showers upon his people. They dwell secure because “he has strengthened the bars of [Jerusalem’s] gates” and “granted peace within [Jerusalem’s] borders.” They are sustained “with the best of wheat” and shepherded by the very “statutes” and “ordinances” of the Lord, which “he has not made known to [other nations].” On this feast of Corpus Christi, we also celebrate the care God has bestowed upon us by feeding us at the table of the Lord and sustaining us with his Word and commandments. In these abundant blessings we are also called to be a blessing to others. In the first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul asks, “The cup of blessing that we bless, / is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? / The bread that we break, / is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” We know that Jesus’ blood was poured out and his body broken that it might redeem the world.

to psalmist preparation: How are you called to be poured out, blessed, broken, and shared for the life of the world as a participant in the Body and Blood of Christ?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The first reading from Deuteronomy reminds us that “not by bread alone does one live.” At this moment on your faith journey, which spiritual sources are nourishing you?

St. Paul tells the Corinthians that in receiving the Eucharist they become one body in Christ. Where is your parish community in need of healing or relationship building in order to more fully reflect this unity?

On the feast of Corpus Christi we revere the gift of the Eucharist in our lives. This past year, how has this gift of Christ’s Body and Blood affected your life?

How does your parish community, in receiving Jesus, “the living bread,” seek to be nourishment for others?