

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 6:56

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him, says the Lord.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:51-58; L119B

Jesus said to the 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

“Repetition is the mother of learning” (*Repetitio mater studiorum est*). This Latin phrase demonstrates the value that the ancients found in repetition. While we might not want to attend the kinds of schools they did, writing lessons again and again on their slates with a stylus, there was some wisdom in their saying.

Today’s gospel begins with the same verse that formed the conclusion of last week’s gospel: “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.” In case we didn’t get it last week, these are important words worthy of repetition.

That line last week was the pinnacle of a series of “ratcheting it up” on Jesus’ behalf. This week, that line merely sets the stage for Jesus’ going even further. If we thought he was ratcheting it up last week, we are in for more. His opponents immediately questioned Jesus’ meaning about his flesh being true food. In reply Jesus does not apologize for an apparent misunderstanding. He does not say that his image was only a metaphor, not meant to be taken literally. Instead, he adds the term “blood” to flesh and continues with his preaching to mean that unless someone consumes his flesh *and blood* there is no life in that person. And so that there is no room for misunderstanding, he claims his flesh is true food and his blood true drink.

Jesus then spells out the relationship between the Father, himself, and his believers: Jesus has life because of the Father, and those who “feed on” Jesus have life because of him. They abide in him and he in them. The Greek term translated here as “feed on” can mean “gnaw, munch, or crunch.” The term is graphic indeed, and its use is purposeful.

We will not be surprised to see the puzzlement and anger on the part of his opponents grow. Jesus is not backing down; he is not backing away. He continues to raise the stakes and make claims that sound more and more baffling to the crowds and to many others. Only with eyes of faith can we, like his disciples, accept this teaching. Many more are those who will walk away bewildered.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Scripturally speaking, our eucharistic theology is rooted not only in the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper and in Paul’s account of the Lord’s Supper but also in the bread of life discourse from the Gospel of John. This Johannine eucharistic theology is packed into this discourse because there is no “institution narrative” of the Eucharist at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John. For this evangelist, the Last Supper is the occasion of the washing of feet. Yet, John’s theology of Eucharist might be said to be the most profound, reflective, and deep in the entire New Testament.

The Word of God made flesh comes to his believers as flesh. The Bread of Life come down from heaven is literally (not merely figuratively) consumed by the believers who abide in him and thus attain eternal life. The life that is enjoyed by the Word of God because of the Father is given to those who in turn gnaw on that same word.

The bread of life discourse is not merely a lesson for ancient Christians. But in our eucharistic liturgies this discourse finds its true expression, for it is there



