

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B

Have you been in a conversation with a friend, relative or neighbor and discussed the Church? Or have you heard dialogue in the media regarding religion... when, in the course of the conversation, someone claims a certain superiority or greater sophistication by proclaiming, "Well, I'm not religious, but I am spiritual." As if to say, "You can have your foolish and corrupt Church, but for myself, I choose freedom and enlightenment!" Then they go out and build a golden calf or worship the stars or stare in a mirror.

A great many people have chosen to, in their words, "Abandon organized religion and, in turn, become spiritual." One hopes for the best for them.

However, for those of us who remain, including all of you... *the greatest of all gifts is yours!* Today, and for the next 4 weekends, the Church turns her attention to chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel: *The Eucharistic Discourse of Jesus*. In this Scripture, a world of mystery and hope and light and grace is opened to us.

The Eucharist stands at the center of our lives as Catholics... we would all do well to meditate more closely upon the mystery that so many others have chosen to abandon. As a matter of fact, the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel solves a major problem for the world... and gives proof that just being "spiritual" is not enough! For years, largely due to sin, man was extremely frustrated in his attempt to worship God worthily; until the day arrived, when Jesus Christ would become our Paschal Lamb and offer himself as "the perfect evening sacrifice."

From that moment on... man's perfect and complete worship is accomplished in the celebration of the Mass. Christ instituted the Eucharist to memorialize his great sacrifice on the cross and now, if one remains faithful to the Church, we find our perfect manner of worship and praise of God, and the joy of unity with him, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!

Let us turn to the Beginning of St. John's Gospel and learn what the Ancients have left to us: The beginning of chapter six relates the story of the multiplication of the loaves. First, the Gospel relates that "*Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples.*" Perhaps that means nothing to our modern ears, but we need to recall that a rabbi, or teacher, would "sit" to teach his disciples. This tells us something; as we shall see, Jesus is teaching us about the Mass in the context of the multiplication of the loaves.

The Mass, as we all know, has two parts: 1) the Liturgy of the Word [*the readings and the homily*], and 2) the Liturgy of the Eucharist [*the Eucharistic prayers and reception of Holy Communion*]. Yes, as Jesus ascends the mountain and sits down, he teaches the apostles and the crowds by his preaching. Jesus is presiding as the PRIEST and preaching at the first part of the MASS! Here, he opens to his listeners the truths he has come to reveal... much like we do at every Mass during the Liturgy of the Word when we read Sacred Scripture and listen to the homily. *St. Caesarius of Arles (468-542): "Therefore, just as we take care when we receive the Body of Christ so that no part of it falls to the ground, so should we likewise ensure that the Word of God which is given to us is not lost to our souls because we are speaking or thinking about something different. One who listens negligently to God's Word is just as guilty as one who, through carelessness, allows Christ's Body to fall to the ground."*

Next, St. John reminds us "*the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.*" This serves to remind us that this whole chapter is couched in the context of the Last Supper, which, truly, is the first Mass. This is extraordinary: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have narratives of the Last Supper. St. John does not. Why? Because he shows us the Last Supper in multiplication of loaves found in today's Gospel!

And so, Jesus lifts up his eyes, and saw "*a multitude was coming to him.*" Now, we see the assembly gathering around Jesus, just as we gather for every Mass. Really, for Mass to be celebrated well, it should always be in the context of the assembly.

Jesus then questions his disciples about the need to feed the great multitude before him. In a way, Jesus is saying to the apostles: *“Feed yourselves and feed your people, they are in need!”* Jesus is confirming something I already said. He knows we cannot feed or sustain ourselves. We must turn to God! In other words, it is not enough to be spiritual... we are fed by the very hand of God through the apostles of the Church. That is why we “receive” Holy Communion... we never “take” Holy Communion!

To his inquiry, the Apostles reply, *“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?”* Although it is subtle, the similarity to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is evident. The “lad” brings forth his gifts, his contribution, this is the equivalent of the Offertory of the Mass when we bring up the bread and wine as well as the collection: the money you give for the good of the Church’s mission and the poor.

Turning toward the people, Jesus *makes the people sit down...this is yet another important detail! Jesus makes the people recline. Likewise, the Last Supper was eaten when the people reclined.* In Mark 14, Mark begins the narration of the Passover as such: *“When it was evening, he came with the Twelve. And as they reclined at table and were eating...”*

Now we come to the most important detail in the story: *“Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated....”* “Given Thanks”: “Renders the Greek verb *eucharisteo*, from which the English word *Eucharist* is derived. This is how the miracle of the loaves thus foreshadows the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper: in both settings, Jesus takes the bread and GIVES THANKS!” Jesus then distributes the loaves just as he distributes the bread at the Last Supper.

This next line should, now, be recognizable: *“when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost.’”* “...that nothing may be lost” is yet another reference to the Eucharist, which must be preserved and kept from being desecrated. Today, we place the hosts we do not consume during Mass in a tabernacle so they are preserved for the sick or future Masses. Remarkable fact: Christ truly and *substantially* present, not only spiritually (!), in our Churches to be venerated and adored 24 hours a day/seven days a week.

*“So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.”* So, just in case a reader missed what is happening here, the twelve baskets is another clue that points to Jesus as the messiah – when the twelve ancient tribes would be gathered once again... and filled.6:2 *“And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased.”* Why? What were they looking for? The Jews were prepared to recognize the signs of the Messiah: power to control nature and animals [*“Then, the wolf shall be a guest to the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them”* (Isaiah 11:6ff)], to heal, and to bring peace [*“There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord...”* (Isaiah 11:9)].

The messianic banquet was anticipated: *“All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive and eat! Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!”* (Isaiah 55:1ff). The superabundance of bread and fish would have absolutely and completely stunned all present, including the Apostles. *The superabundance of food left over silently, yet very powerfully, identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah!*

What the people in this chapter were searching for... what the people longed to see... standing on the mountain with Jesus, far from their home (what they went out to the mountain to see) ... YOU have before you at this

Mass. YOU have discovered him. YOU now possess him. YOU can be united with God in a unique and remarkable manner.

I am going to give you a bit of homework. School is starting soon, so this will be a bit of a starter! Sometime this week, pull out your Bible and read Chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel! Pray over the words of the chapter. Contemplate the scene. Hear what Our Lord is telling us. Chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel. It is true, St. Matthew records Jesus saying, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He is there spiritually with all certainty. However, in the Eucharist, he is present substantially – a real and full presence... all, so that he might share himself with you.

### **Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time/B**

Gospel is a mystery which needs a key to unlock.

"The Church... has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son. ... the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old ... As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New" (CCC 128 & 129).

What we have in today's Gospel is a new retelling of the old Exodus! Just as God raised up Moses to deliver the Hebrew people from enslavement to Pharaoh, he raises up Jesus to deliver his people from sin or their enslavement to Satan. Moses did this by passing through the water of the Red Sea, just as Jesus would do by bringing his people through the water of Baptism.

The Hebrew people spent 40 years in the desert... as a time of testing. Just as Christians, in the New Exodus, would be tested extensively during the period of their lives (in the desert of the world). Eventually, the Hebrew people passed into the promised Land, just as Jesus would bring his people in to the promised land of his heavenly kingdom!

But, while the Hebrew people wondered in the desert, they succumbed to the arid difficulties of desert life. They complained of their hardship and their hunger: The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to Moses, "Would that we had died at the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!

So, the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion..." In the evening, quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning, a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

The manna, then, becomes a type or a foreshadowing of the Bread that Jesus would give to sustain his people on their journey through life.

\*\* As an aside, note that the Jews grumbled in the desert – a fact that does not sit well with God, who desires their patience and trust. Likewise, as we journey through life, we ought to take care not to grumble and complain... trust and abandonment to God's wisdom is the better way.

Continuing, we can look to the manna of the desert to shed light on the Bread of Life of which Jesus speaks. Let us begin by considering some of what Jesus is teaching the Jews:

Moses promised that a prophet would come, one day, a prophet even greater than Moses, himself. So, the Jews find it necessary to test Jesus to see if he is the prophet of which Moses spoke: “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” They say, ‘Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness’ wanting to provoke Jesus to perform a miracle as Moses did in the desert, which provided bodily food for them. “So, Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ It is established then, that the manna given by Moses was to foreshadow something greater... something more mysterious and profound: that Christ, himself, would become the bread of God, “which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Next, according to the Protestant scholar, N. T. Wright, the “manna was not needed in Egypt. Nor would it be needed in the Promised Land.” The manna was a miraculous food given to the Jews to sustain them in their very difficult journey through the desert. It was not necessary before the juncture in the desert and would not be necessary after they entered the promised land. Just as we are given the sacramental Bread of Life, the Eucharist, not before birth and not after death... it is to sustain us in this life only.

There is something else that may be easily missed as well. We read in Exodus, “In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning ... there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground... [the manna]”. Consider how the Jews were given, not only the bread of manna, but also quail in the evening... so in this ancient miracle, the Hebrews were given bread and flesh. So, centuries later, Our Lord would say of the bread at his last Passover, “take this -bread- all of you, and eat it, this is my body.” The bread is associated with his flesh!

There is also a subtle connection in today’s Gospel to a prayer I hope we pray every day: In the “Our Father” we pray: “give us this day our daily bread.” This bread for which we ask [as Jesus taught] becomes a “prophetic hope for the eschatological journey [our journey, here and now] for we are the exiles who hope to attain the promised land in a new exodus” (cf. Pitre 168).

See Baruch 2:29 [A first century Jewish text; expectation]: “And it shall come to pass... that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed. ... And those who have are hungry shall rejoice: moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day. ... And it shall come to pass at that same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time.”

This prayer reveals the expectation that the future messiah would not only be a new Moses, but that he would bring back the miracle of the manna!

“...it was easily to be understood by his disciples that, as the body is daily nourished with bread, and as the Hebrews were daily fed with the manna in the desert, so the Christian soul thereby might daily partake of this heavenly bread and be refreshed. Moreover, we are bidden in the Lord’s Prayer to ask for “our daily bread” by which words, the holy Fathers of the Church all but unanimously teach, must be understood not so much that material bread which is the support of the body as the Eucharistic bread [for the soul] which ought to be our daily food” (Pius X).

“On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, ‘What is this?’ for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, ‘This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.’” The word manna, in Hebrew, actually means “What is this?” Normal bread comes from the earth, it is made from grains of wheat; the manna, on the other hand, rained down from heaven, a testament that the manna was not of this world. It came from heaven. So, the Jews marveled at what God had done. Ought we, too, to ask of the Eucharist, “What is this?” A supremely gratuitous gift of God that, likewise, came down from heaven!

Psalm 78 refers to the manna as the “Bread of Angels” not that it gives nourishment of the angels, but that it has supernatural origin. Deuteronomy 8:3 - “He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food you and your fathers did not understand, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.” Jesus, himself, is the very word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord... we call him the Word made Flesh. So, we see that the “wilderness manna was not false bread, it was first and foremost a sign of the imperishable and super-substantial Eucharistic bread that the Father sends down from heaven in Jesus” (Ignatius 30).

There is so much more... but we will consider more in the coming weeks. For now, St. Augustine summarizes the Gospel very well for us today: “Our Lord spoke of himself in a way that made him seem superior to Moses, for Moses never dared to say that he would give food which would never perish but would endure to eternal life. Jesus promises much more than Moses. Moses promised a kingdom, and a land flowing with milk and honey, good health and other temporal blessings... plenty for the belly, but food which perishes; whereas Christ promised food which never perishes but which endures forever” (Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, 25:12).

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

### **Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time/B**

Perhaps one of the most difficult doctrines of the Catholic Church is the doctrine of the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I have talked with many Catholics who are truly embarrassed when they doubt or even do not understand the Church’s teaching. As a matter of fact, at times it can be very painful and a source of much anxiety as some of these Catholics struggle to understand.

This, even as, by far, most of those entering the Catholic Church convert for one reason: a hunger of the Eucharist! To assist someone to a deeper understanding of the Eucharist, any good Catholic would turn in his or her Bible to the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel – the Gospel we have been considering these past weeks. Chapter six has become a “proof-text” for the defense or explanation of the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist. As we review this chapter it is evident that the Jews are struggling to accept the teaching of Jesus Christ: seemingly that he would give his flesh and blood as food and drink - and the Jews could not accept the concept.

Yet, I do not think that was the problem. I do not think the Jews were even listening to what Jesus was teaching about the Eucharist. I believe their struggle was much, much greater. In simple terms, I do not think the Jews were rejecting Christ because he was instituting the Eucharist: giving us his Body and Blood... because... I believe the Jews were rejecting Christ because he was making the blasphemous claim that he is, truly, and in fact, God.

He is the God-man... fully God and fully man. Six times in John chapter six - three times in today’s Gospel - Our Lord makes the statement, “I am the bread that came down from heaven!”

No! The Jews were unwilling to admit that Christ was divine: “Is this not Jesus, son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” In other words, we know his father and mother... they are human... how can their son claim to have divine origin?

The rejection of Christ by the Jewish people is the theme of the entire Gospel of St. John. Listen to the voice of Jesus... again, six times in this chapter, he reasserts, “I am the bread that came down from heaven!” This brings us to the entire point. Now we ought to fully understand why is the Eucharist necessary. We refer to the Eucharist from time to time as Holy Communion. Communion. Why is “communion” such an important part of the Eucharist?

It is because in this communion, remarkably – unbelievably – mystically, Christ communicates to us (you and me) a share in his own divinity and he calls this share, “eternal life!” Everything begins to become much clearer: Jesus is revealing that he is God – that he will give his Body and Blood – and this will bring us into his own life. But, first, we must believe he is God!

Jesus, the Second person of the Most Holy Trinity, becomes flesh, becomes human... and in an act of great generosity and power, he communicates a share of his very life to us by giving us his flesh as food and his blood as drink. Such love he has for us! This is what happens every time we receive Holy Communion and this is why we should NEVER receive Holy Communion while under the pain of mortal sin: you cannot unite the divine to that which is unholy!

I would like to share something else with you... something amazing happened this week. As I was preparing to guide the discussion of the Book of Revelation for our Monday night Bible Study, I came across a theory presented by a Protestant theologian. The insight of this theologian struck me so deeply, I pondered the proposal for many days, I was so amazed by what I had read. And it all fits with our topic today.

We have been considering chapter six of St. John’s Gospel. As you know, our text deals with Christ teaching about the Eucharist. James B. Jordan advanced the notion that what we see at the multiplication of the loaves and at the Last Supper has mysteriously been seen before... it ought to feel vaguely familiar.

At the Last Supper [the narration of which we hear day Mass]: Jesus 1) took the bread and wine, 2) gave thanks; 3) broke the bread; 4) gave the bread and wine; 5) and ate with his apostles.

Incredibly, this important action on the part of Jesus harkened back... back, nearly, to the beginning. For, in the Book of Genesis, we read, 1) God took hold of creation; 2) separated it [that is how he creates, he separated the light from darkness, the land from water, the night from the day... thus breaking or separating]; 3) blessed creation; 4) and gave it to mankind... 5) for mankind hungers and he must eat. All of creation was given to mankind that he might eat, be filled, and then REST. Rest with God on the Sabbath... the seventh day.

In like fashion, Jesus gives us the Eucharist, his Body and Blood, to fill us [because we hunger] all that we might know him... that we might rest in him... that we might be comforted in him... that we might be united to him... that our life might find its completion in him.

This is breathless... From the beginning to the end, all God desires is that we share in his life. He wants nothing else from us... an exchange of Divine Love for our human love. There is a simple hint at the truth of this statement: Just as Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit and subjected us to death – so now Christ tells us we must eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life and reverse the curse of Adam!

This makes complete sense, that God would restore a covenant like the original one: with his entire creation. Jesus said, “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 prayer of St. John Vianney: “Divine Savior, while I meditate on the proofs of thy Presence under the Eucharistic veils, enlighten my mind, enkindle my heart, and inspire me with that keen and living faith which is already a vision of thy eternal beauty. Amen.”

### **Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time/B**

Beginning of Today’s Gospel: (6:51) “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

End of Today's Gospel (6:58) "This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

This phrase appears in John [6:51](#) and [6:58](#). But there is another place this phrase [live forever] appears in Sacred Scripture: Genesis 3:22.

After the fall:

"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' -- therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

This was an act of charity: what would it have been like to live forever in a fallen state subject to sin & suffering – in other words, a life apart from God! – and unable to die?

The phrase "to live forever" does not appear in any other place in Scripture. Christ says, "I shall give this bread... to live forever" but not until he has redeemed mankind!

A Problem:

Leviticus 17:14 - "For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off."

"The very reason the Mosaic Torah forbids the drinking of animal blood is the same reason that Jesus commands his followers to drink the blood of the Son of Man: for the life is in the blood."

Blood of Divinity "And to those who lack wisdom he says: come, eat my bread and drink the wine that I have prepared for you. To those who still lack the works of faith and the higher knowledge which inspires them he says: 'Come, eat my body, the bread that is the nourishment of virtue, and drink my blood, the wine that cheers you with the joy of true knowledge and makes you divine. For in a wonderful way I have mingled my divinity with my blood for your salvation.'" -From a commentary on the book of Proverbs by Procopius of Gaza.

Yet another problem:

"The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" Wait! What? "Man?" "Was Jesus talking about cannibalism? Cannibalism was abhorrent to the Jews, but they were reduced to practicing it during extreme famine and military siege. Cannibalism was an extreme sign of God's curse and punishment: Leviticus 26:27-29, Ezekiel 5:10)" (Ray 159).

"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." Stay tuned: answer next week!!

*Trogo* (Gk.): A verb meaning 'chew' or 'gnaw'. Greek literature used it to describe the feeding of animals such as mules, pigs, and cattle. The graphic and almost crude nature of this verb thus adds greater force to the repetition of his words: he demands we express our faith by eating, in a real and substantial way, his life-giving flesh in the sacrament.

Thus, and this is THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH for us as Catholics: by receiving in this sacrament the body and blood of Christ which is united to his divinity, we share in the divine life of the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He will not give them ordinary food and drink, or ordinary flesh and blood, but miraculous food and drink. He will give them the flesh and blood of the Son of man under the form of food and drink (211).

Ignatius of Antioch: “All of you, individually and collectively, gather together in grace, by name, in one faith, and one Jesus Christ, who physically was a descendant of David, who is the Son of Man and Son of God, [for the]... breaking of the one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ” (To the Ephesians 20:2)

The River of Life in Revelation chapter 22 - Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [The tree is the cross, the fruit of the tree is Jesus Christ.]

### **Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time/B**

A few years ago, I was invited to be a guest speaker at a Protestant Church in Carmel, Indiana. To my delight, I found the people very friendly, warm, and anxious to learn about the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church. Even though I was apprehensive at first, the class went very well... perhaps too well.

Toward the end of the session, a man who obviously held major disagreements with the Catholic Church began to disapprove what I was teaching and he began to interrogate me in an antagonistic way – which I found “kinda fun.” In the end, he questioned me at length on the Holy Eucharist -- challenging me to use the Bible to defend the Catholic Church’s teaching that Jesus Christ is present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity under the appearance of bread and wine.

Obviously, this was not hard to do, which I think made him even more irritated with me. His interrogation eventually became more direct:

“So, you are telling me that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ?” I answered, “Yes.”

Leaning back in his chair and smiling, he inquired, “Okay... I go into a Catholic Church, walk up to the tabernacle, open the door, what do I see?” As any Catholic would, I said, “Jesus.”

Unsatisfied, he asked me again, “I go into a Catholic Church, walk up to the tabernacle, open the door, what do I see?” Once more, I responded, “Jesus!”

But again, he persisted, “I go into a Catholic Church, walk up to the tabernacle, open the door, what do I see?” So, I tried to explain: “what you see is the appearance of bread and wine, but...”

And the man interrupted, “That’s all I wanted to know, young man, thank you!”

I felt like I was on trial in a courtroom... and he obviously believed he had won the argument. That time, I let it go. I figured it was useless. Relying on his own reason and his own logic, he was convinced that he was correct.

Ironically, it was about 6 months later, that the Holy Spirit gave me the inspiration I needed to address this man’s concerns. [I have since had a stern talk with the Holy Spirit about his timing!] Following this man’s same logic, we could ask:

“2000 years ago, you are walking the streets of Jerusalem... you see Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth... what do you see? Do you see God? NO, you see what looks like a healthy human being. The divinity of Jesus Christ is carefully hidden in his humanity!”

There is no greater miracle than God becoming Man, we call that the Incarnation. Think: How does an infinite and timeless Being appear on Earth as a man? It is a great miracle. But now, here on our altar and in our tabernacle – perhaps an even greater miracle: both his humanity AND his divinity are hidden in the under the appearance of bread and wine for our consumption! To recognize Jesus Christ as God, 2000 years ago, absolutely required FAITH. Likewise, to recognize Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist today also requires FAITH!

This is the great test comes in the Gospel today: “Then many of his disciples who were listening said, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’” This prompted Jesus to respond, “...there are some of you who do not believe.” This is key: He did NOT say there are some of you who do not UNDERSTAND but that do not BELIEVE!

I doubt we will ever fully understand the mystery of the Eucharist! An old hymn written by St. Thomas Aquinas proclaimed -- “Seeing, touching, tasting... these are all deceived. Only in the hearing, can it be believed.”

Faith. To receive Jesus worthily in the Sacrament does not require our understanding -who can understand the Eucharist?- but it does require faith, belief.

Some refuse to believe. We have brothers and sisters (many who are Catholic), that teach Jesus only means “to believe in him” when he says “eat” and “drink”. They take Jesus’ “hard saying” and make it more easy to accept, by claiming, “to eat and drink his flesh and blood,” Jesus only meant we ought to “believe” in him... that the bread and wine are only a symbol, a sign, a memorial and reminder of Christ’s body and blood.

First, Jesus gives us an answer when he calls himself the “Son of Man” in today’s Gospel. “Son of Man” is a direct reference to the Book of the Prophet Daniel. In short, by calling himself Son of Man, Jesus is telling us he is a majestic, “celestial being” – a being NOT of this world. He is also hinting at his power and divinity soon to be revealed in his resurrection and ascension, where he will sit at the Right Hand of the Father.

We must remember what Jesus said in the Gospel the past few weekends: Jesus called himself the “new manna”; the flesh of the Son of Man [the Eucharist] is like the manna of old that came down from heaven: it is both “real food” but... also... not of this world.

So, we are not being asked to eat the flesh of Jesus in its earthly form in a vulgar, fleshy, or cannibalistic way, but of eating the whole, glorified, heavenly flesh of the exalted Son of Man. Jesus is teaching that he will give his whole body -as he will exist in heaven- and not divided, mangled, and crushed upon earth.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (5<sup>th</sup> Century): “Eventually, then, all the bread is broken, so that all of us who are present can receive a share. When we receive one little mouthful, we believe that in this mouthful we each receive the whole and living Christ.”

“The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.” By these words, Jesus is saying his words are heavenly and eschatological. [By eschatological we mean the fulfillment of all things... and that is happening now... not in the future.] This is the eschatological time: the fulfillment of all things.

Jesus speaks: it is the spirit that gives life in the resurrection (even our own resurrection); the flesh that is not animated by the spirit of God is of no avail, for it remains lifeless... It is a great invitation that Jesus gives us.

An invitation that requires faith, belief – probably more now than ever before. There is no force, we are free to believe or not to believe.

This chapter that we began six weeks ago concludes: 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 [And note how Peter completely lacks understanding, but relies on his faith], “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.”