



Catholicism and Cannibalism **by Joe Sixpack**

The other day, my wife was having a discussion with one of her friends, who just happens to be an anti-Catholic Protestant Fundamentalist. When the topic turned to the Most Holy Eucharist and Communion, the lady dismissively said, “That’s cannibalism.” Her reaction is wrong, sounds crude, is an insult to any Catholic listening, but a reaction that is actually older than the Eucharist Itself.

Before I craft an answer to her accusation, let’s begin by defining what the Catholic understanding of the Most Holy Eucharist is. Catholics in communion with the Church believe that Jesus gives us Himself under the appearances of bread and wine, fully and completely; He is truly present in his body, blood, soul and divinity, in order to give Himself to the Father for our salvation, and to give Himself to us as divine nourishment for our souls. In other words, the ***Most Holy Eucharist is Jesus Christ!***

Belief in receiving the Eucharist is cannibalism is older than the Eucharist Itself, and it’s found in the Bible. Let’s look at excerpts from the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel.

The sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel (verses 22-24) shows the crowds gathered around Jesus the day before seeking Him out at a different place. When they told Him they were seeking Him out, Jesus cut right to the chase so He could get directly to His message: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (a reference to miraculously feeding 5,000 of them [v.10] the day before; verse 26). Then He went on to tell them that He will give them a food that will not perish and will lead to eternal life.

The Jews were incredulous that He said He would lead them to eternal life, that He couldn’t possibly top manna in the desert. But Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (v.35). He went on to explain through verse 40 that He was the bread sent from heaven by the Father.

Up to this point, Jesus’ followers understood Him to be speaking symbolically, but He took that misconception right away from them. He went on to tell them that He was the bread they would have to eat to inherit eternal life.

Here is where the misunderstanding of cannibalism came in. “The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me’” (v. 52-57)

Now Jesus’ followers understand Him to be speaking literally. He said, “...my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (v. 55); the word “indeed” made His statement

imperative. Plus, He prefaced His statement with the phrase “truly, truly,” which He always used to emphasize the importance of what He was about to teach.

It’s no wonder that Jesus’ followers became indignant, as they were repulsed because they thought He was talking about cannibalism! “After this many disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him” (v. 66). If they misunderstood Jesus by taking Him literally, why didn’t He stop them and explain what He really meant? Since this all dealt with eternal issues, didn’t He have a moral obligation to explain Himself? Every other time they misunderstood Him, Jesus explained Himself so there would be no misunderstanding. Why not now? Because Jesus meant to be taken literally! It’s just that they thought he did indeed mean a literal cannibalism. But that isn’t at all what He meant.

Peter handled it the way the others should have. When the others decided it was wise that they “no longer went about with him,” Jesus turned to the apostles and asked, “Will you also go away?” Speaking for the twelve, Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (v. 68-69). In other words, what Peter was saying was that he didn’t know how Jesus was going to do what he said, but he knew it wasn’t going to be an immoral act like cannibalism, and that Jesus would expose it in His own good time.

Peter was not to be disappointed. In Luke 22:15 Jesus said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Imagine that! Jesus knows He is about to die, yet He *earnestly desires* to eat His last meal. If you were on death row, knowing you were about to die, would you be anxious for your last meal? Certainly not! That would be insane... unless you were about to do something infinitely more important than your impending death. And that’s what happened. The first Mass was said and Jesus fulfilled His promise when He said, “*This is my body* which is given for you” (Luke 22:19). He completed it when He said, “This cup which is poured out for you *is the new covenant in my blood*” (v. 20). Far from cannibalism, Jesus gave us His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist.

Our detractors tell us John six and the various accounts of the last supper are merely symbolic. Are they right? Let’s see.

After talking about the last supper and the Mass in the 11th chapter of I Corinthians, Paul wrote, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of *profaning* the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks *judgment upon himself*” (v. 27-29). Now if the Eucharist is just a symbol, how in the world can you profane the body and blood of the Lord and eat and drink judgment on yourself? To receive Communion unworthily is the mortal sin of sacrilege, in addition to the sin(s) that made you unworthy. (By the way, this is why it’s enshrined in both Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church that you must be free of mortal sin before you can receive Holy Communion. If you don’t know what mortal sins are, you’d better learn; it would be dreadful to learn about them when you are standing before God for your judgment!)

So, you decide. Are Catholics cannibals because we receive the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, or are we receiving the greatest gift ever bestowed on mankind by a good and loving God? This is What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

Got further questions about the Most Holy Eucharist? Go to JoeSixpackAnswers.com.