

Reflecting on Sunday's Readings

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—August 8, 2021

Introduction: “It’s scandalous!” You can almost hear the whispered incredulity spread throughout the crowd. Looks of dismay and shock are interspersed by the flashing angry eyes of indignation. In their murmuring you can almost hear them asking, “How could one seemingly so good, doing such miracles and works of mercy, expound such blasphemous remarks?” Their murmuring was not unlike that of their Israelite ancestors in the wilderness when they too expressed their ingratitude by judging the ways of God’s salvation.

The responses of the Jews, and of the multitude of disciples who turned away from Jesus to no longer follow him, provide a commentary on the meaning of Jesus’ remarks in John 6. The scandal, in their minds, was that Jesus claimed to have previously been with God the Father in heaven. Since no man has seen God at any time, or could survive being in the Father’s presence, Jesus’ claim to have been with the Father, and to have spoken directly to him, put Jesus on a par with the great I AM of the Old Testament. Jesus further scandalized these Jewish minds by claiming that, “I am the living bread,” and suggesting that they must eat his flesh, the Bread of Life. We should make no mistake, in their minds Jesus was not speaking figuratively. It was the literalness of Jesus’ remarks that scandalized them. And it would be scandal, if it were not true, but it is true.

Instead of being scandalous, Jesus’ words were life-giving. People are wandering aimlessly in their sins in a way not dissimilar to the Jews wandering in the wilderness, starving for want of spiritual food and a living relationship with the Father. Even as the heavenly manna was sent to nourish the physical bodies of the Israelites, so the Father sent us his Son, the true heavenly food, to nourish our souls. Jesus is the Living Water, the Bread of Life, all that we need to sustain our spiritual life. He was sent from the Father to be freely received by those who believe. However, it requires of us, as it did for the Jews who were scandalized by Jesus’ claims, an abandonment of a salvation and a savior made in our image, one we can understand, and which comfortably meets our preconceived ideas. It also equally requires abandoning ourselves through faith to the mysteries of salvation, a salvation made in God’s image and likeness. And so we see sandwiched between Jesus’ statement that he came from the Father, and his statement that he is the Bread of Life, the requirement to believe, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”

John Henry Newman; Cardinal and Saint, explained, “The Mass is not a mere form of words, —it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is not the invocation merely, but if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. He becomes present on the altar in flesh and blood before whom Angels bow and devils’ tremble. This is that awful [wonderful] event which is the scope, and is the interpretation, of every part of the solemnity.”¹ Therefore, “Let us submit to God in all things and not contradict Him, even if what He says seems contrary to our reason and intellect; rather let His words prevail over our reason and intellect. Let us act in this way with regard to the (eucharistic) mysteries, looking not only at what falls under our senses but holding on to His words. For His word cannot lead us astray,”²

1 *The Heart of Newman*, by Erich Przywara, S.J. (page 153).

2 *Mystery of Faith*, by Pope Paul VI, (page 9).

Gospel Reading — Jn 6:41-51

The Jews murmured about Jesus because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven, ” and they said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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.”

4. What is necessary for a person to embrace Jesus as the Bread sent from heaven?

5. How many statements can you find in this passage to substantiate Jesus’ deity?

6. God’s provision of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) was a foreshadowing of the Father’s provision of Jesus as the Living Bread sent from heaven. How many parallels can you discover that point to Jesus as the bread of life?