

## 19th Sunday (B)

In our Gospel we continue to read from John 6, where Jesus gives us His doctrine on the Eucharist during this conversation with the Jews in the synagogue at Capernaum the day after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000.

Part of the difficulty for the Jews to understand Jesus' teaching is because they were only thinking in earthly terms. They followed Jesus after this miraculous feeding because He filled their bellies. They wanted Him to do it again. From the Gospel last we saw how they came up to Jesus and asked Him for a sign, as all the prophets of old performed signs to show their validity. The amusing irony is that they are asking Jesus for a sign the day after He performed one in the feeding of the 5,000.

Part of the lesson for us is that if we don't see who Jesus really is, then we won't understand the Eucharist. If we don't believe in Jesus, then we won't believe Him when He tells us, "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." The Jews did not have faith in Jesus. They didn't understand His heavenly origin. They think they know him when they said, "Is he not the son of Joseph?" They were locked into earthly thinking. Jesus was trying to expand their minds to begin contemplating heavenly realities. Encountering the Eucharist is to encounter Heaven.

We also touch the divine. When we come to Mass, when we are before the Eucharist, we experience God. This is the heart of the Liturgy. The Mass, first and

foremost, is not about hearing a good homily, or seeing our friends, or leaving church feeling good. These other things can come later, but are not what the Mass is. The Mass is firstly all about encountering God Himself in the Eucharist, which is really and truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. If we don't have faith in Christ, then we fail to grasp this.

This faith is something deeper than the intellect. Even the demons can intellectually acknowledge Jesus' divinity. We see them doing this in the Gospel when Jesus performs exorcisms. As an example, when Jesus encountered the Gerasene Demoniac the demon yelled, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Faith is way more than a simple assent of the mind. It can start there, but it doesn't end there. Because we are fallen we are in constant need of renewal. May this Mass and this Eucharist renew and rekindle our faith in Jesus Christ.

Another important note from our Gospel is that the Eucharist can impart eternal life. The Gospel ended with Jesus saying, "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." Firstly, we see Jesus identifying this true bread from Heaven He has been talking about with His flesh. He was talking about things in general, and now He's moving onto the specific, so that they know exactly what He is talking about. He'll double down on this, that this bread is His flesh, later on. So this true bread from Heaven is His flesh. There is no doubt here.

Also, this bread is so powerful it imparts eternal life. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever.” The Eucharist does this for us. It helps to bring us to Heaven. The Eucharist is sometimes referred to as Way Bread, food for the journey. That special cake the angel gave to Elijah to eat from our first reading is a prefigurement of this aspect of the Eucharist. In the context of the reading, this occurred after Elijah slew the 450 prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. This angered the pagan queen Jezebel, who ordered a hit on Elijah; she wanted him dead. So he was fleeing for his life when this happened. He was given this special cake so that he could reach Mt. Sinai, the Mountain of God, where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments.

Point is, we are kind of in a similar situation. We are on a journey, and so need the Eucharist to help us on our way. Just like Elijah, we are being hunted. There is a hit on us, as there are real spiritual forces wanting to separate us from Christ, and ultimately to bring us to their place of eternal torment. The Eucharist is a great defense against evil. The closer we are to the Eucharist, the closer we are to Christ, the closer we are to Heaven. And where Elijah was going to Sinai to have an experience of God here on earth, we are going towards Heaven, where we will encounter the divine in its fullness.

May we thank God for this great gift of the Eucharist, which is His flesh and blood. May our faith in Jesus be increased. May it help us on our journey, as we struggle against evil. And may it bring us all to live forever in Heaven.