

## Bread of Life

John 6:51-58

When I was much younger – perhaps 12 years old – one of my favorite things was when my brother Chris and I would spend a weekend with my oldest brother, Joe, and my sister-in-law, Sue. Joe was 17 years my senior. Neither one of them were church goers, but Joe made sure that Chris and I went to church on Sunday. He would drop us off by car and tell us where to meet him after church.

But my most favorite memory of that time was the ride home when we would stop at the local Italian bakery in time to pick up some fresh baked Italian bread fresh out of the oven - the wonderful aroma of bread. I can smell it now and it makes my mouth water. Joe would buy 8 long baguettes and we would start the drive home. It didn't take long before we would tear one or two of the loaves in pieces and eagerly devour them on the way...usually arriving with 6 instead of eight. Delicious, downright heavenly, still warm – great bread!

The wonderful smell and taste of freshly baked bread is something that we all can appreciate. I'm hungry now just thinking about it. Whether at home or at the bakery – I never get tired of the aroma of freshly baked bread.

But the real food from heaven is what we celebrate today - Corpus Christi – The Body and Blood of Christ. This feast and readings are about one of my favorite, and probably your favorite topics – FOOD!

Eating is in response to a felt need. When you are hungry, and your stomach is growling and your body is craving food (bread), it becomes almost a passion to cut it, put butter on it and get it in our mouths to satisfy the hunger. It's the same spiritually.

We've all heard the expression, “You are what you eat!” Eating implies an act where the food you eat becomes part of you. It's is personal, very individual thing. No one can eat for you. If **you** are to be nourished, **you** must eat.

Have you noticed that the bread you eat becomes you? And the more of it you eat, the more of you there is? The analogy holds at that point too. When we take in Jesus in the Eucharist, He becomes inextricably mingled with our lives, dwelling in us and becomes part of us. And here we find just exactly what Jesus really has in mind: "If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever." But it's only when I take in Jesus that he comes to dwell in me.

"Jesus therefore 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 within you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

Jesus never stops to clear up the perplexity to the Jews...never stops and says, now wait a minute guys you don't understand. I'm not talking about eating my physical flesh. He never stops to say, now let me see if I can't clarify that. I know it is an easy statement to misunderstand and you might be confused. No, he just hammers it home all the harder and he even makes it more explicit. You must eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood. Their problem is not simply misunderstanding, it's a deep set unbelief and rejection.

It's that very faith to which Jesus calls the Jews as he stands in the synagogue and speaks to them. What's he talking about? His Spiritual life then and there, the abundant life that he said he had come to bring - that abundant, purposeful, loving life that only Christians know. If you don't believe, you don't have life. It's a present tense gift.

Then He adds the eternal component – “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” Not only do you get life here and now, but it is a life that goes on forever - the eternal life that God himself possesses.

"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." Other foods don't last. You eat bread, four hours later you need more. Even the Jews in the Old Testament enjoyed manna from heaven, but they had to eat it every day. It didn't have any permanence, so it wasn't the really true food.

And then Jesus adds: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." What a statement! You not only will have eternal life, but you'll be one with Christ. That's what he's saying. It's back to that part of our analogy - whatever you eat becomes you...the life of God is passed down through Jesus to us. We live because Christ lives in us. Jesus gives us life - and we're all tied into that eternal life with the Holy Trinity. So to eat the bread from heaven, to drink his blood is to be ushered into a union with God.

In just a few short minutes, listen carefully to the Eucharistic prayer and focus on the words of institution: ‘**This is my Body**’ – ‘**This is my Blood.**’ Imagine Jesus himself saying them, and when you come forward to receive Holy Communion, know that you are receiving ‘the bread of life’, Jesus himself - fully present in the consecrated bread and wine.

Do we really understand that today? I’m not so sure. Too often, I think, we see the Eucharistic minister as just a liturgical Pez dispenser – passing out a sliver of bread, again and again, and we don’t truly realize what is happening.

I’ll tell you what is happening. We are receiving an incalculable gift. We are taking into our hands, and placing on our tongues, something astounding. We are being given God – one we should receive with awe and reverence?

**Look at the bread, and you look at Jesus.**

Too often, we take it for granted as just one more part of the Mass. Something else to do. **No - it isn't!**

**Look at the bread, and you look at Jesus.**

Everything we are, everything we believe, everything we celebrate around this altar comes down to that incredible truth. What began two thousand years ago in an upper room continues here and now, and at altars around the world. The very source of our salvation is transformed into something you can hold in the palm of your hand.

When we receive the body of Christ, we **become nothing less than living tabernacles**. God dwells within us and we become what we receive. And what we receive becomes us. That is the great mystery and the great gift of this most blessed sacrament.

What will we do with that knowledge? Once we have been transformed by bread that has been transformed, how can we leave this holy place without seeking to transform the world? How can we just go out and head to brunch, or dinner, or out to do yard work or the weekly grocery shopping?

We carry something greater than ourselves within us. And that makes us literally instruments of God's great work in the world. In some small way, we have all been changed.

Yesterday, I participated in the funeral of a very dear friend – Tom Davis, by name. Tim Connair (also a close friend of Tom's) had told me Tom was at a rehab facility in Fairborn a month or so back. I made a point of going over to visit him and bring the Eucharist with me. I hadn't called and I wasn't sure where he was – wasn't even sure if he would recognize me. Someone on staff gave me directions to Tom's room and I walked in. There was a nurse taking care of someone else who was in the room and I didn't see Tom at first, just a man in a wheelchair asleep near the second bed.

The nurse told me it was Tom and she gently woke him to tell him he had a visitor. Tom looked me directly in the face and the first sentence he uttered was: "Greg Cecere, my old friends, how are you doing?" It was as if we had never been apart.

I told Tom I had the Eucharist for him, he thanked me and I proceeded to say a few prayers before I gave it to him. Then he took my right hand and held on tightly as he bowed his head in prayer, and I suddenly felt like I was now in a holy place. I know Tom was in direct communication with Jesus. I heard none of the noises of the people around us. All I heard was a 'holy silence' while Tom was still...as if there were only 3 people in the room – Tom, Jesus and me.

That is the kind of awe and reverence I would like to have for the Eucharist. It's not just another piece of bread, but the entire essence of Jesus – soul and divinity.

So today, and each time we receive the Eucharist, and when the minister says the words ‘The Body of Christ’ or ‘The Blood of Christ,’ we should respond reverence and with a resounding and heartfelt 'AMEN'!

Deacon Greg Cecere

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**(with excerpts from Deacon Greg Kandra)**