

My Dear People of God,

Today we celebrate the twentieth Sunday of the year and continue our journey through the 'Bread of Life Discourse' as related in the gospel of John chapter 6. Last Sunday we had the account of the Jews murmuring because Jesus had said "*I am the bread that came down from heaven*". In their murmuring, they said: "*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, do we not know his father and mother?*" In essence, because they were familiar with the circumstances of His birth, they were obscured from the reality of who He was.

Today's gospel begins from where last Sunday's ended. Jesus speaks in an even more definitive manner. In response to their murmuring, He said to the crowds: "*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.*" If He had not been clear before, he now makes it even much more crystal clear. In response, the Jews who initially were only murmuring, this time quarreled saying; how can this man give us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink? In reaction to their quarrelling, Jesus even takes it a step further by saying to them: "***Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him***"

In unmistakable language, Jesus declares that his flesh is food and his blood is drink. It can't get any clearer than this. Lest this claim go unnoticed, He states it four times (verses John 6:53-56). The phrase 'flesh and blood' is rich in meaning, it refers to the whole persons and it ultimately anticipates the sacrifice of the cross; Jesus being victim on the cross. The flesh and blood of Jesus become the source of life for those who partake of it. In other words eternal life comes from feeding on Jesus, not simply from believing in him.

The mission of Jesus in this world is a mission of salvation. He came out of God's love for us so that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but rather may have eternal life. Jesus links the gift of eternal life to Himself, the bread of life: whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. The God whom Jesus calls Father is the source of eternal life and Jesus already enjoys eternal life because of His intimate union with God (His Father). Those who believe in Jesus as the bread of life already begin to enjoy eternal life because they feed on Jesus (the bread of life).

Jesus develops the eating metaphor still further. He maintains that just as we and what we eat and drink become one, so Jesus and those who feed on Him form an intimate union. In a mutually intimate way, they abide in Him and He in them. This implies that Jesus does not merely visit those who feed on Him, He stays with them; He dwells there permanently. Eucharistic union with Jesus is as intimate as is the act of eating, and the mutual indwelling that results from it is just as personal.

My dear brothers and sisters, this is a truly bold and hard saying from Jesus and this is the source and summit of our faith as Catholics, the Eucharist. In the Eucharistic bread and wine we eat His body and drink His blood. We are told that only if we eat and drink what He offers shall we have eternal life. Of course it is not merely eating, but believing in what we are eating. Otherwise, like the Jews, we may be murmuring and in so doing miss out on the true gift, eternal life. Jesus makes the claim and extends an invitation. How do we hear it? Do we truly believe? Does our life and conduct show that we believe in His real presence in the Eucharist?

Thanks and God bless

Fr Simon Peter