

Homily. 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 17/18 August 2024.

It's true to say we become what we eat and drink. None of us can live long or well without these necessities. When we take them into ourselves we become made of them and they make us who we are. This is how it all started when Jesus took the little boys offered lunch of 5 small barley buns and 2 dried fish, miraculously feeding the hungry crowd. This great sign though couldn't end at this, even if the crowd were satisfied and intent on only more of the same food without working for it and no cost.

This led them to seeking Jesus out which got him to reply that, yes, some work was needed if they wanted what the sign meant, the Bread of Life. The work that needed doing was to believe in him. Further to this, Jesus taught them that He was the Living Bread come down from Heaven giving life to the world. They could trust their believing in him because he was already and always would be giving his life, his flesh and very self away in service of our good and creation's salvation. The Cross of Calvary is the final ultimate proof of his dedicated service and sacrifice.

Still, the people had their doubts and complaints about what Jesus was saying and asking; sadly nothing new at all in this all too familiar scenario. Undeterred by these questions and objections, intent on peeling all the layers of the sign away, Jesus took his teaching to where we are tonight. His life given as food and drink for our inner spirits, our souls, would be freely available and it will be by eating his body and drinking his blood that we can come to eternal life, with him living in us and we in him.

No great wonder then that some accused the early Christian people of cannibalism without understanding the language of the Eucharist, for it's to the Eucharist that Jesus teaching has arrived and of which he is now speaking. He is the bread and drink of life, not only for that crowd he was addressing, but for every crowd that gathers in every time seeking more, seeking God's nourishment on the great journey of faith through this life.

It's our participation in the gift of the Eucharist that obliges us to tend to the physical needs of others, as well as their spiritual desires. It's simply not possible, not congruent for us to eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Lord and then not care for those who haven't the material necessities of life. In giving others these basic human needs we, like Christ himself, enact a sign pointing to a deeper but just as essential reality. This deeper reality is our daily human living that longs for meaning, purpose and direction; that longs to live in a fully human way which is ever hungering and thirsting for the eternal life that befits the spiritual beings we are who are having a material, earthly existence.

In short then, the Eucharist celebrates our faith, our work of believing in Jesus as the One sent by God. It unites our belief and service of others to his great sacrificial offering, given in service to God and for the whole world's renewal and life. Our efforts to live the meaning of our faith are in response to Jesus giving himself for us and to us, his flesh and blood nourishing us on him as he comes alive in us and as we become what we take in, namely Christ himself for others. This is what the sign of bread means and it's how Sacraments work, giving us the Grace-life of God. The last step in this teaching of life will be heard by us next weekend.