

“Sorry, I’m a vegetarian.”
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 6:41-51

I find it very striking how “matter-of-fact” Jesus is in this interaction. There is no negotiating, no explanation, no attempted convincing. This group of Jews is terribly uneasy and critical. And Jesus just *tells it like it is*. Jesus’ telling it like it is, is reminiscent of a declaration made several times before, in the synoptic gospels: “Whoever has ears, ought to hear.”

The first thing Jesus gives, however, is a straightforward correction: **“Stop murmuring among yourselves.”** Ooh: Jesus getting testy? I *love* it. “Clam it!” He says. Again, keep in mind: Jesus knows what He is doing. Our job, in reading these incidents, is to decipher how proceeding in such fashion is wise and loving.

Jesus seeks to shake this group of Jews from their negative inter-subjectivity, which closes them to anything new. He then makes an amazing claim: **“No one can come to me unless the Father draw him.”** In other words, **“No one can discover who I am, the Bread of Life, without the Father’s helpful attraction.”** Without God’s help, we cannot know God. God is far too mysterious. Without God’s help, we cannot know Jesus as God, as God who gives Himself completely—like bread. He then adds a seemingly unrelated claim: **“And I will raise him on the last day.”** The fruit or consequence of coming to Jesus—thanks to the Father’s attraction—is that of being raised on the last day. In other words: resurrection to eternal life—*even in our bodies*.

Jesus then insists, increasingly “matter-of-fact”:
“I am the only one who has seen the Father.”
Talk about being “in your face”.
Jesus risks enraging his listeners.
For some reason, however, he does not hold back.
Au contraire.

He promises eternal life to those who believe, i.e. who welcome.
He declares again that he is the bread descended from heaven,
and then some.
He declares that anyone who eats this bread, who eats *him*, will live forever.
This, of course, leads to being very specific:
“The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”
Outrageous. Unnerving.

Any sound mind would ask exactly what the Jews then ask:
(in the verse that follows this passage: stay tuned next week!)
“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”
I do not see how anyone could not pose the question.
And, if we have not, it is time.
“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”
Many Christians, *we* perhaps, at times, downplay/circumvent Jesus’ claim.
**“Oh, don’t be silly. Chill. Jesus is being poetic. He doesn’t give us his
flesh to eat. He’s not some weird cult leader promoting cannibalism.”**
Here, in this place, we do not downplay or circumvent.
The Catholic Church does not downplay or circumvent.
In fact, I would go so far as to say that
the Catholic Church exists *because* Jesus gives us his flesh to eat.
We take Jesus at his word.
“The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” *and*
“Do this in memory of me.”
Of course, the Church has come to understand how it is not cannibalism
—which is not a dismissal or circumvention of it.
We receive the body of the Risen Lord,
which means a “spiritualized” body —for lack of a better term.
It is a real body, *His* body, no longer bound by time or place
—which is why the Eucharist can be endless, simultaneous celebration.
A little deep, huh? It sure is...

The centrality of The Eucharist is such
that we have the *altar* at the very center of our worship space.
Those churches that do not accept the Eucharist obviously
have no altar, only a pulpit—and maybe a drum set!
The Eucharist is, I suppose, too mysterious for them.
Is it that they only want the “manageability” of the Bible?
The Scriptures lead to the Eucharist: words lead to loving gestures.
Jesus speaks to us before sharing with us His heart.

We deliberately gather to “**do this in memory of**” Jesus—
memory, not in the sense of vague recollection, but “in the person of” Jesus.
We gather to receive this mysterious gift of himself in the form of bread.
The bread, in turn, helps us to understand something of the gift.
Bread is necessary food.
Jesus is the truest satisfaction of our hearts: bread *of life*.
Bread is simple gift, such that we need not fear.
Jesus comes as bread so that we not fear (panophobia is really quite rare!)

If we find all this outrageous and unnerving,
 let us have enough simplicity to say it to Jesus.
Just tell him. He will help us. The Father will help us.
It cannot be believed, welcomed without the Father’s attraction.
It is far too mysterious.

Come, you who hunger, receive bread, the Bread of Life....

