

“Does this do anything for you?”

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

John 6: 60-69

For the past three weeks we have plunged into a large part of chapter 6 of John’s gospel:

- the discourse on the bread of life
- the relentless invitation to encounter with Jesus, the bread of life.

As we discover, Jesus’ intention to share Himself in such an intimate way does not go without reaction.

“I am the bread of life.” (v. 35, 48)

“I am the living bread that descends from heaven.” (v. 33, 41, 51)

“The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” (v. 51)

His Jewish listeners are repulsed.

“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52)

With no explanation, Jesus insists.

“My flesh is true food. My blood is true drink.” (v. 55)

The insistence, the *persistence* in self-disclosure proves too disturbing—even for his disciples.

“This saying is a hard. Who can accept it?” (v. 60)

What does Jesus say? What does Jesus do?

How does Jesus respond to the statement?

Fully aware of rejection,

“Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe.” v. 64)

Jesus pursues them in love.

How amazing. How amazingly moving.

But, Jesus does not say what one might expect (or has been sometimes said):

“Wait a second guys. Don’t get so excited. I don’t really mean ‘my flesh’.

That would be grotesque. I’m just trying to be colorful. I mean that

we’ll be tight. Gee: doesn’t anyone get metaphor anymore?”

Jesus in no way downplays his statements.

Indeed, Jesus later gives a bread—at the Last Supper—

and says, **“This is my body.”** (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19)

How does Jesus respond?

He acknowledges that what He shares is mysterious,
and beyond reasonable or reasoned grasp.

For us to know Jesus as Bread of Life,
for us to believe, i.e. *experience* Jesus in the Eucharist,
we need the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.
Jesus is essentially saying to them,
**“I understand. It’s weird. It’s shocking. Call upon the Holy Spirit,
and He will give you insights and an open heart.
Left to your own resources—“flesh”—you will be at a loss.”**

Of course, many of the disciples do not welcome.
Many of the disciples do not get it, do not want it.
In their opinion, Jesus is taking them too far.
They find themselves unbearably far outside of their comfort zone.
**“Many of his disciples returned to their former way of life,
and no longer accompanied him.”** (ch. 6, v. 66—no comment!)

Jesus then poignantly turns to the Twelve
“Do you also want to leave?” (v. 67)
Jesus gives them an opportunity to choose something, someone else.
Why?
Because the whole purpose of his sharing is *closeness*,
and closeness requires a choice.
Closeness with another person does not just happen.
In order to experience what Jesus shares, they must *choose*.
Jesus has come close.
The Twelve must choose—in faith, with faith.
In Peter, they do:
**“Lord, you have become our everything. We don’t get it either,
but we have experienced enough that we will trust you
and let you take us where you will.”**

This is our story.
Jesus comes close to us.
God comes closer and closer.
We may not always be aware of it,
but His coming does not depend on our awareness.
Our experience of closeness with God does depend on us, on our choice.
Why? Because love can never be forced.

This is our story—but there is perhaps a difference.
The disciples are hearing this for the first time.
Most of us have heard this *a thousand times*.
Most of us have inherited this gift.
In other words, most of us have been raised in this,
in a community where the bread that is Christ's flesh, the Eucharist,
has been celebrated over and over and over.
The Eucharist has become commonplace,
so commonplace that the probability that it shock us is *remote* (!).

Jesus asks *us* how the gift of Himself in the Eucharist impacts us
—although he probably formulates the question somewhat differently.
Not “**Does this shock you?**” but “**Does this do anything for you?**”
[Jesus tells us as well that whoever eats this bread will have eternal life.
Of course, it is not automatic,
for it is in the context of relationship from which we are free to go astray.
But nonetheless: bread unto eternal life.]

“**Does this do anything for you?**”

“**With all the religions on the face of the earth,
with all the non-Catholics who seem to be doing just fine,
with all the fervent Christians who do not believe in the Eucharist,
can this be true?**”

“**Does this do anything for you?**”

Jesus [then] tells us also that the Spirit gives life.

Jesus [then] tells us that the Eucharist

- cannot resonate as intimate and true
- cannot really “do anything for us”

with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Honestly, how can we possibly believe, without God's help, that,
in association with a little piece of flat bread, God comes to us?

How can we possibly hunger for Jesus in the Eucharist
without the Holy Spirit stirring us deep within?

Wherever we may be, we owe it to ourselves,

we owe it to God, to beg the Holy Spirit to awaken and enlighten us.

Family tradition and religious obligation are no longer enough for church.

There needs to be a personal awakening, a personal encounter.

You will notice how the Eucharist here is a deal-breaker.
What should unite Christians—indeed, the world—divides.
This gift is central.
The shock—back then and today—inversely testifies to it.
If we do not discover the gift: Christ present, come close in this way,
giving himself in relentless love,
the likelihood that we “return to our former way of life”,
i.e. that we check out in one way or another—including while in the pew,
is rather high.
With all due respect, there is too much working against us, against staying:
from outside the Church and inside the Church and inside ourselves.
Between religious cynicism or just sheer distraction in society,
between scandal, mediocre liturgies and bad hair in the church
between our own indifference or fears, it is not easy.

We need not worry, however.
We must simply be aware and deliberate, and trust.
We are indwelt by the One who makes this possible.
Come Holy Spirit.
Come Holy Spirit.