

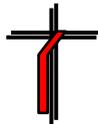
Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

"Bread of Life"

20-B // August 19, 2018

Proverbs 9:1-6 Ephesians 5:15-20 John 6:51-58

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Nearly a century and a half ago, a poor family from a tiny Yugoslavian village decided to migrate to the United States. The family was made up of a father, a mother, a teenage boy and four little girls. A week before their ship was to sail, the family's relatives and friends gave them a "going-away party." They gave the family practical gifts of several loaves of hard bread and several blocks of cheese. A week later the family boarded an Italian ship. Since they had never gone any further than the outer edge of their village and since only a few on board spoke Yugoslavian, they were overwhelmed by what they saw and heard. It was a cold winter day so the family went immediately to their third-class cabin below deck. There they stayed to themselves and ate the bread and cheese sparingly to make it last the entire ocean voyage. On the last day of the journey the weather cleared a bit, and the teenage boy was growing restless. So he asked his father for permission to go above and explore the ship. When the boy did not return within the hour, the father went looking for him. He found him in a big dining room, sitting at a table eating from a plate overflowing with meat, vegetables, and even desert. The father's heart stopped. Immediately he had visions of spending the first days in the United States in prison because there was no way he could pay for all the food his son had ordered and was eating. When the son saw how frightened his father looked, he said: "Don't worry dad, it's free. While we have been fasting on rations of bread and cheese, everyone else was feasting on banquets like this. The meal is free. You see, the meal is included in the price of the ticket."

The world is full with people like the poor Yugoslavian family. They are journeying through life, totally unaware of the incredible Banquet of Life that God spreads for them each and every day. It is the banquet of the **Most Holy Eucharist** and it is included in the price of the ticket of life. Jesus refers to this incredible banquet in today's gospel reading. Listen again to what he says: ***"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."***

For the last four weeks we have heard the Evangelist John speaking about food. John's chapter six is about sustenance. It is about eating. It is about nourishment. **It is about the Eucharist.** It started with the great miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish. After that we heard Jesus warning the people not to work for food that perishes. Last week Jesus boldly stated, ***"I am the bread that came down from heaven,"*** and this week he tells us that, ***"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."***

Listening to these words from the Gospel, we should ask ourselves: If we eat his flesh and drink his blood, then **why do we continue to be spiritually weak?** This question should lead us to a profound, serious and personal reflection. When I receive Communion during the Holy Mass, do I firmly believe that I am receiving, **“the living bread that came down from heaven?”** Or do I think this is only symbolic? Our Lord assures us that during the Holy Mass, during the consecration, the bread and the wine are changed into his Body and his Blood. Receiving him then, we are strengthened. He gives us the spiritual strength and the faith we need to recognize that he **is** truly present in this sacrament we call the Eucharist. However, sadly as it may seem, there are some of our Catholic brothers and sisters who receive Holy Communion but who do not believe. I wonder how many of us are aware of what percentage of Catholics, do **not** believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Many surveys have been conducted to find the answer and they all vary based on which survey you look at. But the point is, if there is one catholic, only one catholic who does not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we have an enormous failure in the teaching programs within our Church. On a more serious note, it’s also a cause for sadness, since it means that he or she has lost sight of **the** most central truth of our faith—**that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.** **How can our faith be strengthened** so that we can come to know the Lord better, if we do **not** believe in this sacrament?

When we eat ordinary bread, that bread becomes a part of us. It enters our body and changes into us. But when we eat **the Bread of Life**, the opposite happens. It doesn’t change into us; **we** change into it. It transforms us into what it is: the Body of Christ. And this is why, if we eat it, we are transformed into Christ who lives forever.

When you pause to ponder this great mystery, you can’t help but marvel at what an incredible gift it is and on the other side of the coin, what a tragedy it is to go through life totally unaware of this incredible gift, this Banquet of Life that comes with the price of the ticket of life. Yet, my brothers and sisters, there is something even infinitely more tragic. And that is to go through life aware of the Banquet of Life but to take it for granted and fail to appreciate it and that lack of appreciation is reflected in our attitude and our actions after receiving Communion.

When receiving communion we are entering once again into the most profound experience of communion between man and God. At Eucharist, **we become one with Jesus Christ and one with all who are fed by him.** It is difficult to believe that some Catholics, who would **not** refuse an invitation to a banquet or a party given by some important person or friend, will refuse to accept the invitation that Christ gives them to

share in his Body and Blood. They do not see the enormous need they have to receive this sacrament. Not attending the banquet that the Lord himself holds for us is a great mistake that we will regret later on in our lives.

As we continue with our Eucharistic celebration, during the consecration, when the priest and the deacon together elevate the Host and the Chalice, I invite you to look upon the **body and blood of Christ** and proudly and boldly profess, ***“My Lord and My God.”***

So now we say that we believe. If that is the case then, we need to show that belief when we come forward to receive the Eucharist. When the priest, deacon or the Eucharistic Minister say, “The Body of Christ,” “The Blood of Christ,” proudly and boldly profess that belief by saying out loud, **“Amen.”** Receive the Eucharist with pride, with dignity and with respect.

It’s hard to comprehend that there are folks who will wait in line for hours to be in time for the first kick or the first pitch of a sporting event or for the first curtain call of a play or a show and yet they will **habitually** show up late for mass. I consider that a downright insult and disrespect to the host of the banquet. If you are late don’t even enter the church, go home or stay outside and do your socializing. That way, you will be early or at least be in time for the next mass.

In a few moments, as we approach this table to receive ***the living bread that came down from heaven***, let us ask our Heavenly Father to guide our conscious that we may believe that we are truly receiving Jesus Christ himself and let us open our hearts to receive the new life that he brings to us. Let us ask Christ to fulfill his promise when he said, ***“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”*** And as always, as we continue to walk united as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, let us ask him to guide our thoughts, our feelings and our actions.

What a tragedy it was for that poor Yugoslavian family who made the entire voyage to America unaware that the ship’s meals came with the price of the ticket. An even greater tragedy is for people to make the entire voyage of life unaware that the Banquet of Life comes with the ticket of life. But an infinitely greater tragedy is for people to make the entire voyage of life unaware that they have turned the Banquet of Life into a lifeless routine by failing to make it a prayerful experience.

The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my Shepherd. I walk with no fear.

May God Bless each and every one of you.

