

August 19, 2018 - Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily by Deacon Steve Livingston

We are now at the fourth of five consecutive Sundays where we are hearing the sixth Chapter of the Gospel of John. First ... three weeks ago ... we heard about the feeding of the five-thousand. A week later ... we heard that we must seek food that does not perish and ... that Jesus Himself is the “Bread of Life”. Last week, He promised that whoever eats this “Bread of Life” will live forever and the Bread He will give is His flesh for the life of the world. And today He declares that His flesh is true food, and His blood is true drink. Moreover, whoever eats Jesus’ flesh and drinks His blood remains in Him ... and Jesus remains in him and the one who feeds on Jesus will have life *because* of Him. He solemnly declares: “... unless ... you eat the *flesh* of the Son of Man and *drink his blood*, you do *not* ... have life within you.” And finally, next week, we will hear how this teaching was so roundly rejected by all but a very few.

To my mind, these five readings are some of *the most important* we will hear in the entire three year cycle ... because it is in these readings ... that we hear this ... outpouring of divine revelation that is ... St John’s profound and unique discourse on the institution of Eucharist. Matthew, Mark and Luke all set this institution in the background of the Last Supper. And their accounts are very similar and are concerned more with what was said and what was done at that first Eucharist than perhaps its theology. *Not so John*.

John devotes an entire chapter to set forth the Theology of the Eucharist without ever mentioning the Last Supper. And from this tiny seed of teaching, planted in the tiny town of Capernaum ... among a tiny handful of men ... most of whom would *utterly* reject it ... has spread *throughout* the ages and *throughout* the world and has been accepted and celebrated by billions of Catholic, Orthodox and *some* ... Protestant Christians for centuries. Sadly ... there *are* signs that this may be changing.

Since I came into this world in the mid-1940s ... in my brief seventy-one plus years I have witnessed many changes in the world ... some good ... some *not* so good. And of all the many changes I have seen ... perhaps the most profound and the most awesome is the geometric increase in the various realms of scientific knowledge. It is positively mind boggling. Yet with all this vast increase of scientific knowledge ... with its immense potential for good ... there seems to be ... for many ... a corresponding decrease in trust or even belief ... in the spiritual. Even Christ’s ultimate gift of Himself in Eucharist is ... relegated by many ... to the status of myth or fairy tale ... to be believed only by the uneducated ... the superstitious. It seems sometimes that as we have increased in knowledge perhaps ... we have decreased in wisdom.

Knowledge and science are ... of course ... wonderful gifts ... and only in the *absence* of wisdom ... will they supplant faith. Yet in ever increasing numbers of people are being converted to the worship of a ... Science ... unfettered by faith in God and often ... unfettered *even* by ethics. If it *cannot* be detected with the senses or *proven* by formulas or human logic it simply does not exist. And certainly Christ’s real presence in Eucharist cannot be detected by the senses or proven empirically therefore it too, must not exist.

Many Protestants ... at or since the Reformation ... have concluded that it is merely just symbolic or that it just figuratively *represents* the body and blood of Christ. Even strict fundamentalists ... who insist on an *absolute* ... *literal* ... interpretation of every single word in the Bible ... like those Jews of *Jesus’* day ... reject this very *unambiguous* teaching.

Many Catholics ... even some who attend weekly Mass ... statistics tell us ... either do not understand or do not believe ... what the Church has held from the beginning: that at the consecration of the Mass the bread and wine are truly changed into the body and blood of Christ ... and that it is *exactly* ... what He said it is ... that He is *truly* present under the appearance of bread and wine. It does *not* represent ... It is *not* symbolic ... *It is Christ!*

So why *doesn't* Jesus explain this teaching as He had so many times before ... when *other* teachings were misunderstood? He doesn't 'explain' his teaching because there is nothing to explain – there is only faith ... because we *believe* in *Jesus* ... we believe his words are to be accepted ... *without* explanation! We simply believe it ... *because* ... *He* said it!

To our world, this is foolishness ... to believe that Jesus can give us His flesh to eat ... but the foolishness of God is *wiser* than human wisdom. Therefore do not *just* be wise in your own estimation. *Trust* in Jesus! *Believe* in the words of Jesus! *Believe* that the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the Bread of Life! Without it ... you *have* no life in you!

St. Paul chides us: "... live, not as foolish persons but as wise. Wisdom invites us saying: ... "... Come; eat of *my* food, and drink of the wine *I* have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live; *advance* in the way of understanding." ... Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.